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Innovations in Public Involvement for Transportation Planning

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Innovations in Public Involvement for Transportation Planning

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Innovations in Public Involvement for Transportation Planning

INTRODUCTION

▶ **Public involvement in transportation planning** has a new emphasis since Congress passed the **Federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Act of 1991 (ISTEA).** Federal regulations to implement ISTEA call for proactive public involvement processes. They must respond not only to the requirements of ISTEA but also those of related Federal acts, such as the Clean Air Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

This set of notebook pages has been prepared to introduce agencies to some **practical techniques of public involvement** that can be used in a variety of situations. It is geared to the needs of State agencies and metropolitan planning organizations (MPO's), particularly some smaller MPO's with less extensive public involvement experience. It is intended for use both by public involvement specialists and by others who have public involvement responsibilities. It is not the whole answer to public involvement but a starting point to stimulate responsiveness to ISTEA. **Techniques should always be tailored to local conditions and should be as creative and fresh as possible** to attract public interest.

In these brief leaflets, certain familiar and established techniques are included for several reasons. First, they may be useful in areas where they have not yet been tried. Furthermore, even though they are familiar, some of these techniques are being used in innovative ways to fulfill the objectives of ISTEA. The more traditional approaches are supplemented by newer, less familiar techniques that may provide unique approaches to involving the public. **Agencies may want to combine techniques to achieve the maximum impact in encouraging involvement of the public.**

Arranged in a random order, each of these leaflets outlines the fundamentals of a technique, along with its advantages or drawbacks, its potential applications and special uses, its utility to agencies and citizens, and its resource requirements. There are **examples** of how these techniques are being applied across the country, along with **telephone numbers** for agencies where the technique is being used.

▶ CHARRETTE

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

What's a charrette?

▶ A charrette is a meeting to resolve a problem or issue. Within a specified time limit, participants work together intensely to reach a resolution. The sponsoring agency usually sets the goals and time limit and announces them ahead of time. The charrette leader's responsibility is to bring out all points of view from concerned citizens as well as agency representatives and experts.

Here are the usual **components** of a charrette:

- definition of issues to be resolved
- analysis of the problem and alternative approaches to solutions
- assignment of small groups to clarify issues
- use of staff support people to find supporting data
- development of proposals to respond to issues
- development of alternative solutions
- presentation and analysis of final proposal(s)
- consensus and final resolution of approach to be taken.

Why is it useful?

▶ A charrette is problem-oriented. The breadth of background of participants will assure full discussion of issues, interrelationships, and impacts. Its time limits challenge people to rapidly, openly, and honestly examine the problem and help potential adversaries reach consensus on an appropriate solution. For example, charrettes were used to formulate alternatives to a controversial highway project in Knoxville, Tennessee, and a downtown plan for Jacksonville, Florida, by guiding business and civic leaders and neighborhood people to a recommended solution.

A charrette produces visible results. It is often used early in a planning process to provide useful ideas and perspectives from concerned interest groups. In mid-process, a charrette can help resolve sticky issues. Late in the process, it it useful in resolving an impasse between groups.

How does it relate to ISTEA?

▶ A charrette can support the goals of ISTEA by expanding ISTEA's basic concept of giving citizens a reasonable opportunity to comment on transportation planning and programming. It provides a special, intensive occasion dedicated to hearing comments from citizens and working with them. It encourages public comment by being interactive and responsive. It focuses on the generation of fresh ideas and approaches. It is intended to bring public comment into the planning process early, rather than at the end.

A charrette can enlarge the degree of public involvement in transportation, reducing feelings of alienation from government. It offers citizens interaction with public agencies and allows for questions to be asked before decisions are made. It supplements, but does not replace, other kinds of public involvement.

Does a charrette have special uses?

► **A charrette calls attention to an issue.** It can dramatize:

- the need for public attention to resolve an issue;
- a deliberately participatory problem-solving process:
- a public agency's openness to suggestions;
- a search for all possible approaches to a question;
- a democratically-derived consensus.

A charrette can generate alternative solutions to a problem. The setting encourages openness and creativity. All suggestions from the group—however outrageous—should be examined to encourage thinking about better approaches. In New Hampshire's Community Stewardship Program, for instance, volunteer experts are invited by towns to help assess strengths and weaknesses of town planning.

Who participates? and how?

► **Any citizen can participate in a charrette.** A wide range of people with differing interests should attend. Traditional participants represent organized groups, but individuals with any stake in the issue should be encouraged to attend.

How citizens participate depends on the charrette leader. An experienced leader assures that a range of views is heard. The leader invites citizens to take a stance and present their points of view. All participants are assured an opportunity to speak out, and the leader should encourage even the most reticent participant to speak up without fear of rebuke or ridicule. The open, free-wheeling charrette format encourages enthusiasm and responses.

How do agencies use the output?

► **A charrette sharpens agency understanding** of the perspectives of interest groups. Early in project formulation, a charrette offers a glimpse of potentially competing demands and can be a barometer of the potential for consensus. Thus it helps generate alternatives and identify issues. In Minnesota and Alabama, for example, State agencies respond to the needs of individual towns by providing experts for weekend charrettes.

Who leads a charrette?

► **A leader experienced in charrette techniques is a must.** To avoid chaos, a high level of discipline is required in a charrette. The charrette leader should be familiar with group dynamics and the substantive issues the group will face. The leader tailors the setting, background materials, and issues to the goal of the charrette and elicits participation from all group members within the allotted time. One or two staff people should be available for support to the leader and to supply data and information.

A **steering committee** usually makes arrangements for the charrette. It may be composed of representatives of Federal and State transportation or other agencies, consultants, affected municipalities, and citizen groups. The steering committee should agree upon the leader of the charrette.

What does a charrette cost?

▶ **A charrette involves significant resources.** The chief items are sufficient space and background materials and an experienced leader. Graphics must be used so that participants can quickly comprehend the problem and envision alternative solutions. Background materials must be available at the start of the charrette so that no time is lost in investigating the problem. If the preparatory work leading to a charrette is done in-house, it can be time-consuming. If done by a specialist, it can be expensive.

Staffing should include:

- a leader experienced in the charrette technique;
- staffers who understand the derivation and use of the data;
- staffers who have worked on the problem;
- staffers who have worked with applicable policy.

Materials can include:

- large maps;
- overlays to allow sketching on maps;
- boards to display applicable data;
- large newsprint pads and markers to record ideas;
- photographs of sites;
- handouts of basic goals/time limits/meeting ground rules;
- printed background information with background data.

How is it organized?

▶ **Organization can be a significant task.** Depending on the issue's complexity and the intended length of the event, this work includes:

- obtaining agreement on the process;
- obtaining agreement on timing;
- determining potential participants;
- finding an experienced charrette leader;
- managing special funding, if required;
- seeking out resource people;
- sending out invitations and background material well in advance;
- finding an appropriate space for meeting;
- handling required publicity;
- setting up space to encourage informal discussion;
- portraying issues clearly in both verbal and graphic form.

Is it flexible?

▶ **A minimum of two hours** is essential for a charrette focused on a modest problem. However, many charrettes are day-long events.

A charrette can occur at any time in the planning process, but preparation is crucial. Advance work can take a month or more, depending on the issue to be discussed. Charrette materials are flexible and should be tailored to the focus of the meeting.

How does it relate to other techniques?

▶ **A charrette can be combined effectively** with other techniques. When matched with a **citizen advisory committee,** it can focus on solving a specific problem. Paired with the **visioning** process, it is an attractive means of eliciting ideas. A charrette can also focus on a single issue raised during a **brainstorming** session. In Portland, Maine, a two-day charrette on the long-range plan followed a **transportation fair.**

What are its drawbacks?

▶ **A charrette is a one-time event.** Thus, the invitation list and timing must be thoroughly considered and discussed to maximize interaction through broad-based participation. Goals must be made clear so the expectations of the charrette do not exceed possible results. The depth of analysis from a single short session can be disappointing. Follow-up work must be carefully considered both before and during the charrette.

When is it most effective?

▶ **A charrette can resolve an impasse.** During such a use, neutral participants should be involved to bring fresh ideas for consideration. When a problem is immediate, a charrette can be effective because people are vitally interested in the outcome. For maximum effect, a charrette should have the approval of elected officials, agency heads, and citizens' groups. A charrette is also useful:

- early in the project;
- following a brainstorming session;
- when focus on a single issue is required;
- when a range of potential solutions is needed.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ▶

American Institute of Architects' Regional/Urban Assistance Team (R/UDAT), (202) 626-7358

American Society of Landscape Architects, Community Assistance Team, (202) 686-2752

Minnesota Design Team, Minnesota Department of Trade & Economic Development, (612) 297-1291

New Hampshire Community Stewardship Program, (603) 271-2155

Portland, Maine, Area Comprehensive Transportation Committee, (207) 724-9891

Urban Land Institute's Panel Advisory Service, (202) 624-7133

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▶ VISIONING

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

What's visioning?

▶ **Visioning leads to a goals statement.** Typically it consists of a series of meetings focused on long-range issues. Visioning result in a long-range plan. With a 20- or 30-year horizon, visioning also sets a strategy for achieving the goals. Visioning has been used to set a long-range statewide transportation plan in Ohio, a statewide comprehensive plan in New Jersey, and a regional land-use and transportation plan in the Seattle region. It has been used by the governor of Georgia, acting as "Chief Planner," to create long-range goals for the State. Central Oklahoma 2020 is a visioning project for a regional plan.

Priorities and performance standards can be a part of visioning. Priorities are set to distinguish essential goals. Performance standards allow an evaluation of progress toward goals over time. In Jacksonville, Florida, a community report card is used to determine priorities; each target for the future is evaluated annually. In Minnesota a statewide report card was used to evaluate the current status and set up goals and milestones for the future. Oregon established benchmarks to measure progress toward its long-term goals.

Why is it useful?

▶ **Visioning offers the widest possible participation** for developing a long-range plan. It is democratic in its search for disparate opinions from all stakeholders and directly involves a cross-section of citizens from a State or region in setting a long-term policy agenda. It looks for common ground among participants in exploring and advocating strategies for the future. It can bring in often-overlooked issues about quality of life. It helps formulate policy direction on public investments and government programs.

Visioning is an integrated approach to policy-making. With overall goals in view, it helps avoid piecemeal and reactionary approaches to addressing problems. It accounts for the relationship between issues, and how one problem's solution may generate other problems or have an impact on another level of government. It is cooperative, with multi-agency involvement, frequently with joint inter-agency leadership.

How does it relate to ISTEA?

▶ **Visioning significantly expands ISTEA's basic concept** of giving citizens a reasonable opportunity to comment on transportation planning and programming. It goes beyond the merely reasonable by maximizing concern for public input and by offering multiple opportunities for such input. Its ultimate product is an integral part of the State or regional policy guidance contemplated by ISTEA.

Visioning enlarges the degree of public involvement in transportation, particularly for long-range plans for a State or region. It expands the political process by soliciting citizen help in setting generalized priorities. Similarly, it assists in establishing the general approaches to improvement programs.

Does visioning have special uses?

► **Visioning uses participation as a source of ideas** in the establishment of long-range policy. It draws upon deeply-held feelings about overall directions of public agencies to solicit opinions about the future. After open consideration of many options, it generates a single, integrated vision for the future based on the consideration of many people with diverse viewpoints. When completed, it presents a democratically-derived consensus.

Visioning dramatizes the development of policies to get people involved in specific topics such as transportation infrastructure. In Ohio, the Access Ohio program was designed to establish goals and objectives for development of transportation projects and programs. Other States that have used visioning to establish long-range goals include Kansas, Georgia, Texas, Florida, Iowa, Oregon, and Minnesota.

Who participates? and how?

► **Invitations to participate can be given to all citizens** or to a representative panel. A broad distribution of information is essential. This information must be simply presented, attractive, and rendered important and timely. It should also include clear goals of participation and show how comments will be used in the process.

Citizens participate through meetings and surveys. A typical method of involving citizens is through a questionnaire format, seeking comments on present issues and future possibilities. A report card filled in with citizens' opinions was used in Jacksonville, Florida. In Minnesota, opinions were elicited through small or large public meetings at locations distributed equitably throughout the State. In the Research Triangle region of North Carolina, participants drew pictures of their vision of the region's future and of transit opportunities in words and pictures on wall-sized sheets of paper.

How do agencies use the output?

► **Visioning helps agencies determine policy.** Through widespread public participation, agencies become aware of issues and problems, different points of view, and competing demands. Drafting responses to comments aids in sharpening overall policy and assists in focusing priorities among goals, plans, or programs. Visioning can also help surface and resolve conflicts among competing priorities.

Who leads a visioning process?

► **A chief governmental official can lead visioning.** In several States the governor has made visioning a cornerstone of State policy planning for infrastructure investments and State operational departments. The governors of Oregon, Texas, Iowa, Minnesota, Georgia, Florida, and New Jersey have fostered visioning for their States.

Agencies have also led visioning projects. Statewide agencies are leading new visioning projects in Maine and Hawaii. Regional agencies are leading visioning projects in Jacksonville, Indianapolis, and Seattle.

What does visioning cost?

▶ **Visioning costs can vary.** The chief items are staff time and materials sufficient to set up and carry out the program. Staff people should include a leader committed to the process, a community participation specialist who is well versed in the applicable policies, and staffers who can interpret and integrate participants' opinions from surveys and meetings. Meeting materials are minimal but can include large maps and newsprint pads and markers to record ideas. If forecasts of information are developed or if alternative scenarios are to be fleshed out, research and preparation time can be extensive.

How is it organized?

▶ **A specific time period is scheduled** to develop the vision Statement. The schedule incorporates sufficient time for framing issues, eliciting comments through surveys or meetings, and recording statements from participants and integrating them into draft and final documents.

Visioning staff members are typically assigned from existing agencies that are familiar with issues and essential contacts to be maintained. In Minnesota and New Jersey, staff was assigned from the State planning office; in Jacksonville, Florida, from the Community Council/Chamber of Commerce; in Ohio, from the Ohio Department of Transportation.

Is it flexible?

▶ **Visioning can be extremely flexible** in terms of scheduling and staff commitments. Scheduling can take weeks or months. Staff can be temporarily or permanently assigned to the project.

Preparation for visioning is crucial and touches on many complex issues. Advance work is essential to give time for staff to prepare the overall program, agendas, mailing lists, questionnaires, and methods of presentation and follow-up. The visioning program should be carefully scheduled to maximize citizen input and response time prior to selecting final policies.

How does it relate to other techniques?

▶ **The visioning process involves using many techniques** of public involvement. In the Seattle area, the visioning process on regional growth and mobility futures included the most extensive regional public involvement effort ever conducted in the area: symposiums, workshops, newspaper tabloid inserts, public hearings, open houses, surveys, and community meetings.

Visioning leads toward other public involvement techniques. As a policy umbrella, it can precede establishment of a **citizen advisory committee** and guide its work in reviewing individual projects or programs. It can lead to **brainstorming** sessions or **charrettes** to solve individual problems. Visioning can be the basis for public evaluation and implementation; it led to performance monitoring of State agency activities in Oregon, Minnesota, Iowa, and Texas, followed by reports to the public.

What are its drawbacks?

▶ **Time and staff requirements are significant** to maintain contact with the numerous citizen participants and carry the program forward. The numbers of participants varies from 100 community leaders in Jacksonville to an estimated 10,000 citizens in Minnesota. Listening to participants can consume several months' time. Full-time effort is required of staff when the process is in motion.

The staff needs patience to deal with so many diverse views and individuals, time and schedule requirements, and complex issues and interrelationships. Finally, visioning is a one-time event and remains on a generalized policy level; there is a substantial risk that the resulting document will not satisfy all interest groups.

When is it most effective?

▶ **Visioning is of maximum use at an early point** in the establishment or revision of policies or goals. Used in this way, it demonstrates openness to new ideas or concepts that may be suggested by the public. For maximum effect, a visioning project should have the active support of elected officials, agency heads, and citizen groups.

Visioning is useful

- to set the stage for shortr-range planning activities;
- to set new directions in policy;
- to review existing policy;
- when integration between issues is required;
- when a wide variety of ideas should be heard; and
- when a range of potential solutions is needed.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ▶

Iowa Department of Management (Futures Agenda), State Capitol Building, Des Moines, IA 50319, (515) 281-3322

Jacksonville Community Council (Quality Indicators for Progress), Jacksonville, FL, (904) 356-0800

Minnesota Planning (Minnesota Milestones), 658 Cedar Street, St. Paul, MN 55155, (612) 296-3985

Ohio Department of Transportation (Access Ohio), 25 South Front St., Columbus, OH 43216, (614) 466-7170

Oregon Progress Board (Oregon Shines/Oregon Benchmarks), 775 Summer Street, NE, Salem, OR 97310, (503) 373-1220

Puget Sound Regional Council (Vision 2020), 216 First Ave. South, Seattle, WA 98104, (206) 464-7090

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▶ BRAINSTORMING

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

What's brainstorming?

▶ **Brainstorming is a simple technique** used in a meeting where participants come together in a freethinking forum to generate ideas. As now used, brainstorming is no longer an unstructured method of eliciting ideas from a group. Used properly—either alone or in conjunction with other techniques—brainstorming can be a highly effective method of moving participants out of conflict and toward consensus. For example, the Cape Cod Commission in Massachusetts used brainstorming to develop goals and objectives to guide transportation planning.

Brainstorming has these basic components:

- generating as many solutions to a problem as possible;
- listing every idea presented **without** comment or evaluation;
- grouping and evaluating ideas to reach consensus; and
- prioritizing ideas.

Experience suggests that each of these tasks can be further subdivided to improve understanding of the overall process and its results. For example, ideas may need clarification for the group to grasp and evaluate, or the role of brainstorming in issue resolution may need to be explained. As a basic means of involving citizens, it has few peers if carried out successfully.

Why is it useful?

▶ **Brainstorming brings new ideas to bear on a problem.** The freethinking atmosphere encourages fresh thinking. Creativity is enhanced when individuals are encouraged to bring up ideas that might initially appear to be outrageous. Even imperfectly developed thoughts may jog the thinking of other participants. In Atlanta, a brainstorming effort produced future options in the Vision 2020 process.

Problems are defined better as questions arise. Alternatives appear in a new or different perspective. Novel approaches to an issue can occur during the process. Brainstorming gives participants a sense of progress and accomplishment and helps them move onto more difficult tasks.

Brainstorming can help reduce conflict. It may help participants see other points of view and possibly change their perspective on problems. It may not be useful in resolving deeply felt conflicts but could help set the stage for a different technique if an impasse has been reached. Civility of each participant is required.

Brainstorming is democratic. All participants have an equal status and an equal opportunity to participate. No one person's ideas dominate a brainstorming session. Brainstorming heightens the awareness of community and sensitizes individuals to the behavior of the group and its participants. It helps mold participants into a working group.

How does it relate to ISTEA?

▶ **Brainstorming could be a part of nearly any program,** especially if used as input to early planning stages. It effectively enables both the general public and organized groups to participate in developing specific elements of plans and programs. In statewide planning, the large geographic scale requires a coordinated series of brainstorming meetings.

Does brainstorming have special uses?

▶ **Brainstorming demonstrates openness** in the approach being taken to uncover new ideas. It demonstrates a commitment to working with community participants. It can lead to further study of unexplored ideas. It helps find common ground for consensus about a solution. Brainstorming has been used by the Connecticut Department of Transportation in exploring multi-modal alternatives in an interstate bridge reconstruction project in New Haven.

Brainstorming is a technique that is easily understood. No special training is required for participants to express their ideas. Expectations on all sides are for open and frank exposition of points of view. Argumentative behavior is discouraged. Creativity is appreciated.

Who participates? and how?

▶ **Any citizen can participate in a brainstorming session.** It is useful to encourage participants from diverse backgrounds and interests in the issue to be discussed. Providing background information to participants bolsters the ability of each to participate. Information should be distributed in advance of the brainstorming session, if possible. Large groups can be divided into smaller subsets to promote full participation.

Citizens participate by bringing their ideas to the table. All ideas should be duly noted and recorded to reassure participants that their comments are being adequately considered. The participants can record ideas on newsprint or butcher paper or the agency can supply staff to record their ideas. Citizens can prioritize their ideas by using strips of colored adhesive half-inch dots (found in office supply stores). About seven dots per person works well. Working individually, participants use dots to indicate their preferences. The dots can be divided among seven good ideas or concentrated on one idea that is very important. The sheets of paper with dots are an effective display of the prioritization and help to identify the group's top priorities. Participation is furthered when notes of the meeting and subsequent events can be distributed to the participants.

How do agencies use the output?

▶ **Brainstorming helps agencies develop projects** and programs and can be useful in developing policy as well. Through brainstorming, agencies become aware of issues, problems, and detailed solutions that might not otherwise come to light. New ideas can assist the agencies in crafting compromise positions and in setting priorities by using input provided directly by stakeholders. For example, Shelburne, Vermont, and Flathead County, Montana, used brainstorming sessions to clarify and prioritize issues for new area plans.

Who leads a brainstorming session?

▶ **Brainstorming needs a facilitator or moderator,** who may be found within the group itself, the agency staff, or an outside firm. S/he must be sensitive to group dynamics and be able to draw statements and positions from participants in an affable way. S/he must assure that all participants are heard and that civility is maintained. An agency staff person may be needed to assist groups that have difficulties with the process.

What does brainstorming cost?

▶ **Brainstorming is inexpensive.** The group leader can be an individual on an existing staff, but a person experienced in facilitating the technique is preferable. Depending on the issue to be discussed or the degree of anticipated conflict, an outside consultant would be a desirable addition.

Material needs are minimal. A quiet room is essential. Materials should be on hand to provide necessary data and background information. Although this information need not be overly detailed, questions are certain to arise, and it is preferable to be able to respond appropriately. Potential materials include

- large newsprint or butcher paper, with markers to record ideas;
- boards to display applicable data;
- large, easily visible maps;
- overlays to allow sketching on maps;
- adhesive dots for prioritization.

How is it organized?

▶ **Careful management facilitates a brainstorming session** best. Agency staff work is needed to organize and implement a brainstorming session. Staff needs are minimal but may include a facilitator and probably an assistant for physical management of charts and recording of ideas. Resource people are needed to be present for responses to questions by participants.

Initial efforts include planning the brainstorming session. This should include defining the precise issue for the session, determining potential participants, determining the process and schedule to be followed, and determining anticipated outcomes of the session so that players will know the scope and stakes involved in the brainstorming discussion. It is also important to detail for participants how the agency expects to use the results of the session. Effective brainstorming sessions should be small (six to ten people). If the group is too small, however, participants are not stimulated to generate ideas; if it is too large, the more vocal few many dominate the meeting. At large meetings, participants are divided into table-top groups.

A brainstorming session usually has a simple agenda:

- introductions with brief outlines of individuals' backgrounds;
- discussion of brainstorming process, how it fits into overall scheme;
- generation of ideas, listed without evaluation or criticism;
- clarifying and explaining ideas, as required;
- review, grouping, and elimination of redundant ideas;
- prioritization;
- presentation of each group's results by the moderator to the larger group.

How does it relate to other techniques?

▶ **Brainstorming is always a stage of a larger process.** It is frequently used when an agency is starting a lengthy or complex undertaking with a separate element for citizen involvement. It can be part of a **focus group**—to open the discussion and introduce participants; it can be part of a **charrette**—to establish the points-of-view of participants; it can be used in **community advisory committees**—to establish a consensus on a project; it can be used in **public meetings.** Brainstorming was used in conjunction with **citizen surveys** to design a public involvement program for the Albany, New York, area. In Pennsylvania, community members used brainstorming to select representatives for a citizens' advisory committee.

What are the drawbacks?

▶ **Facilitation of a brainstorming session can be dicey.** A single questioner can disrupt the group by continuously raising questions and suspicions about the motivations of participants or sponsors. Unassertive participants may be neglected without active solicitation of their participation. Opponents may refuse to consider each other's ideas.

Unspoken attitudes may affect results. Individual participants who feel diverted from more apparently purposeful tasks may become impatient if they feel the process is a waste of time. People who feel that they are being controlled or patronized may withdraw from full participation. Agency staff members who feel that the process is leading nowhere may not respond appropriately to questions from participants.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ▶

Atlanta Regional Commission (Vision 2020), (404) 364-2500
Cape Cod Commission (Cape Cod Regional Plan), (508) 362-3828
Capital District Transportation Committee, Albany, New York (citizen involvement program), (518) 458-2161
Connecticut Department of Transportation, Environmental Planning Bureau (Q Bridge Study), (203) 594-2939
Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, Bureau of Environmental Quality, (717) 783-4580

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▶ CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

What's a Citizens' Advisory Committee?

▶ A Citizens' Advisory Committee is a representative group of stakeholders that meets regularly to discuss issues of common concern. While Citizens' Advisory Committees (CAC's) have been used for many years and the technique itself is not innovative, it can be used very creatively. For example, a CAC was used in Louisiana to find consensus on environmental issues for input to public agencies. In Florida a CAC advised on designs for deployment of a traffic information system.

Representation of agencies on a CAC is highly desirable as a means of interaction between citizens and their government. For example, in Portland, Maine, a thirty-five-member CAC developed a long-range transportation plan with agency help. Because it can be used either alone or in conjunction with other techniques, a CAC is widely used to achieve a basic level of citizen input to transportation planning and development.

A CAC has these basic features:

- Interest groups from throughout the State or region are represented.
- Meetings are held regularly.
- Comments and points of view of participants are recorded.
- Consensus on issues is sought but not required.
- A CAC is assigned an important role in the process.

Why is it useful?

▶ A CAC is a forum for hearing citizens' ideas. It is a place where agencies can present goals and proposed programs. It provides a continuing forum for bringing citizens' ideas directly into the process and a known opportunity for citizens to participate. In the San Francisco Bay area, special efforts have been made to include representatives of disabled citizens and minorities, including Spanish-speaking people.

A CAC molds participants into a working group. It is democratic and representative of opposing points of view, with equal status for each participant in presenting and deliberating views and in being heard. It is a place for finding out stances of participants on issues. It is a place where citizens can become educated on technical issues, over several meetings if necessary. It gives a better understanding of the effort and milestones of public agency progress. Its members feel freer to ask agencies for assistance, for clarification of points, and for follow-up on questions.

How does it relate to ISTEA?

▶ A CAC provides ongoing opportunities for citizen input. As an established institution, a CAC expands ISTEA's basic concepts by giving citizens periodic opportunities to comment on a process of transportation planning and programming. By providing multiple opportunities to be heard, a CAC requires consideration of conflicting stances—a democratic process of give-and-take. A CAC can meet ISTEA requirements to bring Indian tribes or intermodal interests into the planning process.

Does a CAC have special uses?

▶ **A CAC demonstrates commitment to participation.** Its existence demonstrates progress toward involving citizens in projects and programs. It helps find common ground for consensus about a solution. If consensus cannot be reached, a CAC provides a forum for identifying positions, exploring them in depth and reporting the divergences of opinion to the agencies.

A CAC is flexible. It can be part of regional or State planning or of a single project, with citizen participants' assistance in anticipating construction and identifying measures to reduce potential disruption. It can be subdivided: in the St. Louis area, three CAC's were formed to develop the regional long-range plan, and in Albany, New York, eleven special-issue groups advise the Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Who participates? and how?

▶ **Representatives of citizens' groups or stakeholders** are selected to participate in a CAC. They are selected in one of two ways: 1) an agency carefully identifies all stakeholders, including the general public; and 2) the public self-selects the CAC memberships; i.e., those who are interested attend. If membership is not fully representative, the agency might encourage unrepresented groups to attend or seek their input in some other way.

Diversity in viewpoints is a plus, to ensure full discussion. Though no special training is required, attendees typically have a broad, long-term view in discussing issues within a geographic area—not a specific, single project. In many areas, such as San Francisco, special efforts are being made to involve freight transporters.

Citizens participate by examining and discussing issues with others. Mailings prior to the meeting help participants to understand issues and to form questions. Major points of the discussion are typically recorded; in some instances substantial detail on issues is desirable. Through such a process a regional transit plan for the Seattle area was prepared by a citizen sounding board of forty community representatives who worked for more than a year with agency officials.

How do agencies use the output?

▶ **A CAC helps to monitor citizen reactions** to agency policy, proposals, and progress. Observing interactions at the periodic sessions of a CAC, agencies become aware of opinions and stances at an early point in the process, often before they become solidified or difficult to modify. Working with the CAC, an agency can craft compromise positions through give-and-take and over a relatively short period of time. For example, in Pennsylvania a CAC helped determine the extent to which a highway project would affect a rapidly developing area in the Pocono Mountains.

Who leads a CAC?

▶ **A CAC elects its own leader.** Dynamic and firm citizen leadership is effective in enlivening a CAC. In Chatham County–Savannah, Georgia, a charismatic leader strengthened the CAC's role in planning. Typically, CAC members select a leader who can deal with agencies in an open and friendly manner and who is sensitive to group dynamics and able to effectively lead the discussion and draw opinions and positions from participants.

What does a CAC cost?

▶ **A CAC requires support staff within an agency,** and the work required can be substantial. Meeting minutes must be taken. Background information, minutes, and agendas must be sent out before meetings. A site for the meeting must be selected. Agency representatives must attend to provide resources for CAC questions and response preparation. A CAC may want to sponsor a special meeting on transportation's role in the community, as was done in Pittsburgh. Additional assistance may be required in some instances. For example, in Washington State a CAC led by a facilitator helped plan a highway bypass on the Olympic peninsula.

Material needs are minimal, but a quiet meeting room is essential. Written materials may be needed at hand to supplement or give depth to the notes mailed prior to the meeting. In many cases, an agency needs to carefully explain its position or analysis, requiring staff and materials at hand.

How is it organized?

▶ **A CAC must have limits on its size** to encourage discussion. Either the overall size is limited, or a large CAC is divided into subgroups. This can limit the number of interests represented or limit the interaction between interests. Recognizing these limits, a CAC must attempt to bring these interests, when known, to the table. This becomes a task for a sponsoring agency.

A CAC usually has a board of directors, with a chairperson or director, an assistant director to chair meetings in the absence of the chairperson, and a secretary to record minutes (this person is sometimes on an agency staff). Elected officers may serve for a year or more.

CAC meetings are managed by the elected officers with the assistance of agency staff. Formal parliamentary procedures, if oriented toward voting, are less useful than informal rules and consensus-building techniques. Meetings are usually held on a regular basis.

Pre-meetings help to plan the regular sessions and to draft policy goals. CAC officers and agency staff work together to bring substantive issues before the larger group. Subcommittees may be established to explore details of issues, with meetings held between the regular sessions of the CAC.

A typical CAC agenda would cover the following items:

- introductions, if attendees vary each time;
- welcome to newcomers;
- discussion of agenda, seeking potential changes;
- discussion of items on agenda in order unless change is requested;
- presentations of information as necessary for clarification; and
- determination of whether a consensus on each issue exists.

How does it relate to other techniques?

▶ **An established CAC is the basis for many techniques** of public involvement. These other techniques can take place within a CAC meeting. A CAC leader can use **brainstorming** to establish consensus on a project. **Facilitation** by an outside specialist can be used within a CAC to establish or resolve a particular or pressing problem. A CAC can use the **visioning** technique to establish long-range policy goals. A CAC should be able to consider the special issues of **Americans with disabilities. Video** can be used to illustrate specific points.

What are the drawbacks?

▶ **A CAC can seem to be manipulated by an agency** unless information from governmental sources is fully shared. The CAC may feel it is outclassed or overwhelmed by technical information if care is not taken by agencies to explain essential facts or features. In such cases, a CAC may become inactive.

A CAC is useful only on a regional scale. A statewide CAC can be unwieldy because of the required number of people involved and because of the traveling required of both staff and participants.

A CAC does not represent all points of view. By virtue of being representative, it is never all-inclusive. A CAC's voice may be skewed if it does not represent all stakeholders and the general public. It may be difficult to represent minority interests.

Opponents may refuse to consider each other's ideas. People who feel that they are being controlled or patronized may withdraw from full participation. Agency staff members who feel that the process is leading nowhere may not respond appropriately to questions from participants.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ▶

Chatham County–Savannah, Georgia, (912) 236-9523
E-W Gateway Coordinating Council, St. Louis, Missouri, (314) 421-4220
Metropolitan Transportation Commission, San Francisco Bay area, (510) 464-7700
Phoenix, Arizona, Regional Transportation Authority, (602) 262-7242
Portland, Maine, Area Comprehensive Transportation Committee, (207) 724-9891
SW Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission, Pittsburgh, (412) 391-5590

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▶ TRANSPORTATION FAIR

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

What's a transportation fair?

▶ **A transportation fair is an event** used to interest citizens in transportation and in specific projects or programs. It is typically a one-day event, heavily promoted to encourage people to see it. Attractions such as futuristic vehicles can be used to bring people to the fair, and noted personalities can also draw participants. New Jersey Transit holds an annual fair in a transit terminal with a festival aimed toward children—including participatory and educational exhibits.

A transportation fair focuses on visual exhibits, such as exhibits, videos, and maps or models of projects. A speaker or presenter is not required, but could help focus the attention of viewers on the purposes of the fair. A fair can gear individual displays toward a desired message. Once prepared, exhibits can be used again at another location and date.

A transportation fair has these basic features:

- visual interest and excitement;
- variety in exhibits: maps, photos, models, slide shows, videos, full-size vehicles, give-away items;
- accessibility in a central location for the target audience;
- extensive publicity to attract participants;
- attraction for a wide variety of people;
- comments and points of view of participants can be elicited—always on voluntary basis; and
- not intended to be permanent.

Why is it useful?

▶ **A transportation fair presents information to the public.** Participants are encouraged to view the exhibits, ask questions, consider the information, and give comments. In San Francisco, a commuter mobile van travels from show to show to promote alternative means of commuting.

A transportation fair creates interest and dramatizes a project or program. Graphics help to present goals and messages in a comprehensible and visually interesting way. Interactive audiovisual and computer-based displays can dramatize programs and encourage public comment.

A fair is a one-time event. With good publicity, it becomes a known opportunity for citizens to participate in transportation planning. The date and place can be chosen to fit within an agency schedule. It can be held annually, as in Boston's World-Class Commuting Day. A fair helps agencies or organizations understand public reactions at a specific point in time.

A fair keeps participants informed, interested, and up-to-date. Sharing information and discussing issues gives participants a status report on projects and programs. At a fair, citizens can become educated on technical issues and gain a better understanding of the effort involved and milestones achieved.

How does it relate to ISTEA?

► **A fair is a non-traditional way to involve citizens.** It is usually fun ("infotainment") for attendees. In the Los Angeles area, fairs have themes, such as a 50s sock hop or stage coach days, to attract participants. A fair fits with ISTEA's requirement of giving citizens an opportunity to comment on a project by offering a new way to learn and respond. A fair presentation can circulate over a large geographic area as an effective way to stimulate interest and gather informal input for statewide planning.

Does a transportation fair have special uses?

► **A fair provides an opportunity for casual citizen input.** As an informal short-term event, it can be held in central locations where many people pass by, such as a store downtown or in a shopping mall. It asks participants to focus on a program's components and details and offer advice and comment if they like. For example, in Idaho, twelve transportation fairs were held in urban and rural regions to talk about statewide transportation improvements.

A fair emphasizes specific, positive points about a subject. It can include exhibits of all types to highlight the wide variety of people, organizations, and effort being used in a project or program. It allows an agency or organization to point up salient, desirable points about a project, while responding to potential drawbacks.

Who participates? and how?

► **Fair attendees are self-selected.** Following publicity, individuals decide whether or not to attend—often based on the location and date of the fair. Because a fair is not an invitational event, a representative sample of citizens' groups or stakeholders cannot be expected to attend. Despite this self-selection, a diversity in viewpoints is usually represented.

Citizens participate through taking part in activities. Attendees examine the presentations and ask questions about the exhibits. At a typical fair, before attendees leave, they will be encouraged to fill out questionnaires or response forms with their written comments. These comments are collected and analyzed for input.

How do agencies use transportation fairs?

► **The principal output is improved citizen awareness.** Written and oral comments by citizens are collected at the fair and used as input to a project or program. This information may be anecdotal but, with analysis, may be of use within the sponsoring organization. As a special example, fairs were held in the Phoenix, Arizona, area to help employers present alternative commuting ideas and programs to employees and get their feedback.

Comments should be used in association with other citizen input. Comments assist agencies in becoming aware of opinions and stances of participants, often before they become solidified or difficult to modify. Because they are made in a casual atmosphere, the comments may be somewhat more conciliatory than would be the case in a different setting.

Who leads a transportation fair?

▶ **Agencies or private groups can sponsor a fair.** Public agencies can hold a fair to detail a specific project and its impacts and to demonstrate support for it. Private transportation management groups can hold a fair to attract new members or explain a new program. Representation of public officials at a transportation fair can be productive, depending on the purpose of the fair. For example, in the San Francisco area, employers sponsor fairs, with assistance from public agencies.

A transportation fair requires no leader on the day of the event. However, a fair can be set up to have specific times for presentations or brief talks or to introduce featured attractions such as celebrities who have agreed to appear at the fair. At such times, there needs to be a moderator or person to make introductions.

What does a transportation fair cost?

▶ **A fair requires support staff within an agency,** and the work required can be substantial. Finding a site for the fair takes advance preparation, usually on land or in buildings that are privately owned. Agency representatives must be alerted to attend if needed to provide a resource to respond to inquiries or to explain technical issues.

Material needs are extensive. Graphics should be sufficiently large and well-prepared to address principal issues. Photographs may be required for orientation. Slide presentations may be desirable. Substantial exhibition room is essential. Written materials may be needed at hand to supplement the graphic presentation. There may be take-away materials as souvenirs, including buttons, maps, brochures, or imaginative graphics. For example, an annual transportation fair for an employer in the Washington, D.C., region includes table-top exhibits by employers, give-away items with emblazoned information, and contests or drawings for seed money to start a vanpool.

How is it organized?

▶ **A fair is managed by an existing organization.** It may have a chairperson or a director, depending on the extent or importance of the event. It needs staff to manage the participating exhibitors, oversee production of graphic or written materials, and make the physical arrangements on the day of the event. In the Los Angeles area, for example, fairs are sponsored by private firms and managed by employer transportation coordinators within these firms.

Organizational meetings will be necessary to set policy and goals for the fair, select the date and place, elicit exhibitors, and develop publicity for wide public distribution. Specific assignments and delegation of responsibilities need to be made to assure production of exhibits on time.

How does it relate to other techniques?

▶ **A fair can complement other involvement techniques.** Not a stand-alone approach, it can pair well with other techniques and show products of citizen participation, such as the results of a **brainstorming** session. It can be sponsored by a **citizens' advisory committee** to show work in progress. With **videos** or fixed exhibitions, it can display goals or accomplishments of a public agency.

A fair can be used to interest citizens in transportation, or to set the stage for upcoming events, such as a complex, large-scale project. It can be used to elicit candidates for membership in a Citizens' Advisory Committee for a project or program. It also can be used to present awards to individuals who have been motivated to improve transportation services.

What are the drawbacks?

▶ **A fair cannot replace other techniques.** As a one-time event with self-selected participants, it may not be representative of all interests. It is temporary in intent and thus does not meet Federal standards for continuing public involvement. It cannot replace a public process that records statements in a more formal manner, where citizens are certain that they are being heard by the appropriate authorities.

A transportation fair does not bring public consensus. There is no deliberation between potentially opposing groups. The principal intent in a fair is to disseminate information, not to receive ideas. Attempts by the sponsor to derive consensus from a fair may cause problems; the sponsor becomes vulnerable to charges of not taking citizen participation seriously.

Representative comments cannot be expected because a fair is not likely to include all potential participants. In fact, comments from participants are appreciated because they are to some extent unexpected. In certain instances, there is little or no feedback that will be directly useful to an agency. However, unarticulated comments do not mean that the fair was a failure; many participants do not view writing comments as an essential element of their enjoyment of the exhibits at the fair.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ▶

Washington, D.C., Council of Governments Ride-finders Network, (202) 962-3327
Commuter Transportation Services, Los Angeles, (213) 380-7750
Rides (Commuter Services), San Francisco, California, (415) 861-7665
Regional Public Transportation Authority, Phoenix, Arizona, (602) 262-7242
New Jersey Transit, (201) 491-7079
Caravan for Commuters, Boston, Massachusetts, (617) 973-7189

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▶ FOCUS GROUPS

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

What's a focus group?

▶ A focus group is a tool to gauge public opinion. Borrowed from the marketing and advertising industry, it frankly regards transportation as a product that can be improved and the public as customers for that product. It is a way to identify customer concerns, needs, wants, and expectations. It can inform sponsors of the attitudes and values that customers hold and why. It can help drive development of policies, programs, and services and the allocation of resources. Focus groups have been used by transportation officials in New York and Illinois as a way to determine public opinions on HOV lane additions and rail transit alternatives.

A focus group is a small group discussion with professional leadership. It is a meeting of a carefully selected group of individuals convened to discuss and give opinions on a single topic. Participants in a focus group are selected in two ways: random selection is used to assure representation of all segments of society; non-random selection helps elicit a particular position or point of view. A combination of selection techniques could result in a focus group of people well-versed in transportation issues as well as those who are solely consumers of transportation services.

A focus group has these basic features:

- a carefully crafted agenda, with five or six major questions at most;
- emphasis on gathering perspectives, insights, and opinions of participants through conversation and interaction;
- identification of major points of agreement and divergence of opinion;
- minimal presentation of material to set context and subject;
- gleaning, not shaping, opinions or perspectives;
- eight to twelve participants; and
- understanding that the participants' role is to give personal insights and perspectives.

Why is it useful?

▶ A focus group leader explores attitudes in depth through follow-up questions. It offers an opportunity to get behind people's expressed attitudes and assess policy directions and program objectives. It is a chance to review allocation of resources. It can help confirm or deny established goals. It can help set new directions.

Informality encourages full participation. The small size of the group lowers barriers to speaking out. A focus group is a place for people to speak out without criticism of their comments. Spontaneity in responding produces fresh information. Participants are not required to prepare for the discussion. Many focus groups have found that participants readily volunteer ideas and comments that have not been recorded elsewhere. For example, focus groups were used in Los Angeles to find out why commuters were not taking advantage of free transit passes.

How does it relate to ISTEA?

▶ A focus group involves citizens in a non-traditional way. Citizens may have difficulty responding to the abstract subject matter of long-range planning not because they lack information but because they do not see the relationship between their lives and transportation planning. Similarly, citizens may not be aware of the implications of the trade-offs made in formulating a transportation improvement program (TIP). Focus groups can elicit and explore attitudes and responses in depth as a basis for broader participatory efforts under ISTEA.

A focus group supplements other forms of public involvement required by ISTEA. It serves the narrowly defined need for direct and informal opinion on a specific topic. For broad participation from all citizens on the same or other topics, alternative forms of involvement are needed.

Does a focus group have special uses?

▶ A focus group provides citizen input from otherwise unrepresented individuals. Residents from specific areas within an urban region can be heard. Geographic-based opinions and issues can be more readily defined and discerned. The Colorado Department of Transportation used twenty regional focus groups for detailed discussion of issues following a statewide citizen survey.

A focus group can be used to marshal expert opinion on a specific plan. Project California used six focus groups of engineers, systems analysts, regulatory officials, and other specialists to evaluate guidelines for encouraging technological development, including electric vehicles, IVHS, and the mass transit industry, in the Golden State.

Focus groups can be used to compare opinions. In preparing Chicago's Downtown Plan, opinions of Loop residents were compared with those of suburbanites; results suggested new directions in commuting and in aligning the proposed downtown light-rail line. Focus groups can also compare opinions that are internal and external to an organization.

Who participates? and how?

▶ Focus group members are selected by the sponsor. Depending on the goals to be achieved, a focus group can be heterogeneous (with a variety of people from different backgrounds within a single geographic area) or homogeneous (with separate focus groups for residents, businesses, and institutions, as in, for example, Boston's Back Bay Transportation Strategies project). Members may be randomly selected or invited from previously identified, non-random groups.

Citizens participate by stating opinions. Individuals within the group may react to others' opinions or bring up their own ideas. The facilitator of the group will guide discussion to cover all agenda items and to assure that all individuals get a chance to speak.

How do agencies use the output?

▶ **A focus group produces opinions from citizens.** For the Massachusetts Turnpike, focus groups helped identify user requests and needs for park-and-ride lots. The output of the group meeting is always recorded in written form for the sponsor's use. In addition to the written document, some agencies use videotapes of the proceedings. Some use mirrored one-way windows to observe the focus group in process.

Focus group information supplements other citizen input. A purpose for the group should be clearly identified beforehand. Its agenda should fit closely within the information needs of a larger project or program. Opinions derived from the group should inform the larger effort. For Chicago's Downtown Plan, the city used four focus groups—from in-town and the suburbs—to find out what citizens liked and didn't like about downtown Chicago.

A focus group is tailored to assess public reactions. Because it typically deals with broad policy or program goals and impacts on the community, it does not dwell on technical issues. It helps agencies or organizations understand overall public reactions to programs or policies at a single point in time. For example, in the San Francisco area focus groups were used to obtain commuter perceptions about ridesharing.

Who leads a focus group?

▶ **A focus group needs a facilitator as leader.** The facilitator is essential to hold the group to the agenda and to elicit opinions from each participant. In some cases, the facilitator is essential to keep a single participant from dominating the proceedings of the group. In other instances, opinions may be lost in a sea of anecdotes unless the group is firmly led toward the agenda by the facilitator.

The facilitator needs guidance on the agenda and purpose of the focus group. Sample questions for the group can be provided to the facilitator to lead the group. The sponsor may want to be present at the group in a non-participatory function or as an outside observer. During a break in the discussion, the sponsor may confer with the facilitator to assure that all agenda topics are being covered.

What does a focus group cost?

▶ **A focus group is relatively inexpensive** compared with the costs and effort involved in administering a full opinion survey. It consumes less time in both implementation and analysis. Extensive statistical analysis is not required because it provides only qualitative information. However, an outside firm is frequently chosen to provide a neutral facilitator, who is paid for leading the group. Public agencies tend not to pay participants, in contrast with private market research organizations.

A focus group need not be time-consuming. The meetings are seldom longer than two or three hours. For the participants' convenience, it may be held after work hours. Schedules can be tailored to fit needs of participants and the sponsoring agency. If required, a focus group can be organized within a matter of weeks following a decision to proceed. It takes a moderate to long amount of time to select, invite, and confirm participants. The time required to prepare focus group agendas and questions is not major if an experienced facilitator is available to work with the sponsor.

How is it organized?

▶ **A focus group is integrated with a larger program.** It is used to inform executives and staff of public reactions to ongoing work. Thus, it should grow from the needs of the larger work and provide supplemental input and information to it. For example, in Florida focus groups were used to define the preferences of commuters and travel-related businesses for community real-time traffic information.

Policy direction within an agency is required. The sponsoring agency selects the agenda, participants, and facilitator and may designate questions to be addressed by the participants. A site for the meeting must be selected and may need to be on neutral ground if the sponsor is not to be identified.

How does it relate to other techniques?

▶ **A focus group cannot replace other techniques** of citizen involvement, but it can provide input. It can be used to identify concerns and issues prior to implementing a **media strategy.** It can be used to refine requirements for transportation alternatives and can be repeated at intervals to gauge changes in public opinion. It can be used in conjunction with quantitative **citizen surveys** as a qualitative supplement.

What are the drawbacks?

▶ **A focus group provides solely qualitative responses.** It is not statistically representative of society at large. While it fits ISTEA's requirement of giving citizens an opportunity to comment on a project, a focus group includes only a sample of citizens. As a one-time event, it does not meet Federal standards for continuing public involvement. It cannot replace a more formal process that records each participant's comments and presents all of them to the appropriate authorities.

A focus group brings no public consensus. Potentially opposing groups do not deliberate important issues. The goal is to obtain opinions—not disseminate information. Specific viewpoints of individuals or the groups they represent are the principal product of a focus group meeting. Thus the results should be used as a guideline for further thinking and analysis.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ▶

Boston Transportation Department (Back Bay Transportation Strategies), (617) 635-3086
Chicago City Planning Department (Downtown Plan), (312) 744-4142
Chicago Regional Transportation Authority (South Corridor Transit Study), (312) 917-0700
New York Department of Transportation Region 10, (518) 360-6006
New Jersey Department of Transportation Long-range Plan, (609) 530-2866
Colorado Department of Transportation Long-range Plan, (303) 757-9266

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▶ COLLABORATIVE TASK FORCE

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

What's a collaborative task force?

▶ A collaborative task force is assigned a specific task with a time limit to come to a conclusion and resolve a difficult issue, subject to ratification by official decision-makers. To date it has been used on a project level or for resolving issues within a project. A collaborative task force is innovative in the extent of citizen *influence,* decision-making, and self-governance. Its discussions can help agencies understand participants' qualitative values and reactions to proposals. It can aid in development of policies, programs, and services and in allocation of resources. A collaborative task force was used to explore alternatives for the Charles River crossing of Boston's proposed depressed Central Artery and to recommend a preference to the State Highway Department.

A collaborative task force has a target date determined by the sponsor to provide a framework for and guide scheduling. For example, in Canada a task force of twenty-four interest groups met over an extended period to plan a light-rail transit facility for Calgary, Alberta. A task force's mission may be defined by the sponsor in broad terms, but the group usually determines its own approach to problem-solving. It is self-governing, and its work is usually based on a consensus process rather than voting.

A collaborative task force has these basic features:

- a sponsoring agency that is committed to the process;
- a task force formed of representative interests;
- emphasis on resolving an assigned issue through task force consensus;
- detailed presentations of material and technical assistance for complete understanding of context and subject matter; and
- serial meetings to understand and deliberate the issues.

Why is it useful?

▶ A collaborative task force helps resolve impasses through a participatory process. Following a difficult process or unsettled controversy, it is a means of involving citizens in solving a problem. In Fort Worth, Texas, the controversial widening of a downtown interstate freeway was the issue assigned to a collaborative task force.

Decisions can be expected to have community support. Task force members represent a broad cross-section of interests. This helps to legitimate the process and decisions. The views expressed are typically exhaustive. Often the group begins by making small and specific decisions early in the processs; later group decisions become somewhat easier.

How does it relate to ISTEA?

▶ A collaborative task force gets citizens directly involved in developing plans and making decisions for official ratification. It provides community-based support for both a planning process and the substance of the discussion. It focuses on the generation of fresh ideas, increasing depth of community involvement. Citizens participate more fully and longer than in some other techniques. The process is long enough to encourage reflection and deliberation by individuals with the people they represent.

Does a collaborative task force have special uses?

▶ **A collaborative task force deals with high-profile issues** that have generated significant public or media attention and community polarization. It can be used productively at any time in a complex project or planning study, but because of time and cost commitments it is often used to resolve an impasse.

It can bring together a wide range of opinions to assist in exploring issues. The breadth of representation is accompanied by depth of probing. In a collaborative task force, a great depth of discussion is expected and can be accommodated. For example, in Maine a group of fifty-eight citizens and agencies worked together to explore Turnpike widening and alternative modes of transit in implementing an initiative approved by the voters.

Who participates? and how?

▶ **Participant groups are invited by the sponsor,** with the groups selecting their representatives. Representatives are selected from affected interests, but the collaborative task force may want to add new representatives to round out its membership.

A broad cross-section of interests is desirable and may include local governments, transportation or environmental groups, civic or business groups, and consumer organizations. Other citizens are involved through outreach and participation programs, including open house presentations or newsletters.

Citizens participate by engaging in the discussion. Members of the group react to each others' opinions and bring up alternative ideas. The facilitator guides discussion to cover all agenda items that the group determines it wants to cover. Coaching and training of participants in the process and in conflict resolution may be necessary.

How do agencies use the output?

▶ **A collaborative task force helps resolve a difficult issue** or problem. Such a group should be used primarily when the agency can commit to serious consideration of incorporating the group's decision into ongoing work. Because of the important role of the collaborative task force, the sponsor may agree to ratify its findings, if not too costly or unimplementable. For example, the Connecticut Department of Transportation formed a collaborative task force to deal with the difficult issues of rebuilding an interstate highway bridge and its approaches in downtown New Haven and agreed to accept the task force's consensus recommendations among alternatives if technically feasible and within the budget.

The sponsor sets broad limits on issues to be explored. A mission statement for the task force should be clearly identified before it begins its work. The schedule should reflect the complexity of the issue and the time that may be required to come to a resolution within the task force.

The sponsor may want to observe the group in a non-participatory role without assuming any leadership function. Representatives of the sponsor can respond to questions from the group and provide technical assistance while retaining a neutral position.

Who leads a collaborative task force?

▶ **A collaborative task force needs a facilitator** to maintain the agenda and schedule and to assure that all participants are heard. The facilitator assists participants in verbalizing or crafting positions and in developing a constructive process for group decision-making, problem solving, and conflict resolution.

The facilitator plays a special role in the task force. Feedback and encouragement to the group are required to maintain progress in the development of issues and steps toward resolution. The facilitator needs to tell the group when the process is doing well and warn them if a dead end or irresolvable conflict is approaching. S/he may need to coach and instruct task force members in methods of conflict resolution.

The facilitator must be viewed as neutral to the process but supportive of the goals and outcomes determined by the group. The chosen person may be from inside an agency but is typically an outsider provided by the sponsor. The group should have the right to dismiss the facilitator if s/he is not perceived to be serving its interests.

What does a collaborative task force cost?

▶ **Significant resources are required.** A facilitator experienced in group processes and conflict resolution is mandatory. Staff technical support is required. Graphics geared to lay people are necessary to understand technical issues. Presentations by technical experts in lay language are required for a full understanding of issues. Modeling of anticipated impacts, structural and engineering issues, and traffic simulations need to be explained. Each meeting can consume several hours.

Specialized consultants may be needed to provide a neutral facilitator or technical support for complex projects. Schedules can be tailored to fit the needs of participants and the sponsor. Meetings may need to be held in the evening to allow participants to attend without interfering with daytime jobs. The time required for preparation is substantial, because each meeting must be tailored to the agenda determined by the group.

Policy support within an agency is required. Staff should follow the course of discussions and respond to the need for information. A neutral meeting site not associated with the agency or any stakeholder must be selected. Staff work is essential for preparation of meeting minutes, notices of upcoming meetings, correspondence, newsletters, press releases, or advertisements about outreach events.

How does it relate to other techniques?

▶ **A collaborative task force acts as an umbrella** and is able to take on other techniques as supplements or use other techniques as needed. **Brainstorming** or a **charrette** can be integral to a task force's work as it seeks solutions to difficult problems. **Visioning** may establish a desirable goal to work towards. **Facilitation** is essential early in the process, when goal setting may help the task force establish a means to measure progress.

The task force can sponsor its own events to apprise the community of issues and potential solutions. These events are useful ways to elicit and review citizen comments and to find responses as appropriate.

How is it organized?

▶ **The sponsor determines the interests to be represented** on the task force and selects a facilitator. Typically, a cross-section of organizations are invited to participate, and each selects its representative to the group. The task force can then identify additional participants who may be essential for broad representation. On two rapid transit lines in Boston, task forces were assembled for the design of each individual station. The Federal Transit Administration has a current project to develop collaborative decision-making processes.

The sponsor sets an overall schedule, leaving detailed scheduling to the task force itself. The sponsor provides technical support, either from within the agency or from consultants familiar with the topic. To retain neutrality, the technical staff should not be co-workers of the facilitator.

The task force can determine the need for a chairperson. The group develops its own norms or rules to guide the process over time. These may be explicit or implicit; in some instances they are prepared in written form to remind participants of their expressed intent.

The task force monitors its own progress. Where appropriate, the facilitator reminds the group of the agenda and schedule and makes suggestions to keep the work moving toward resolution.

What are the drawbacks?

▶ **The process is long and expensive.** To achieve a full understanding of all the issues, an extensive number of meetings and presentations is required. This long process demands patience, good will, and a commitment of continued funding. Participants must make an extensive commitment to the process. Staying with the program over a long period of time may be difficult for many individuals. Similarly, the agency commitment is critical; the process can be long and wrenching.

A high degree of facilitation skill is required to keep the task force on course. Technical support is required to respond to task force questions and prepare responses to unforeseen work that may be requested.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ▶

Calgary, Alberta (Canada) (Light-rail study), (403) 268-1612
Connecticut Department of Transportation, Environmental Planning Division (Q Bridge Study), (203) 594-2939
Federal Transit Administration Collaborative Decision-Making, (202) 366-4060
Massachusetts Highway Department (Charles River Crossing Design Review Committee), (617) 973-7000
Texas Department of Transportation (Ft. Worth study), (871) 370-6542

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▶ MEDIA STRATEGIES

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

What are media strategies?

▶ **Media strategies inform customers** about projects and programs through newspapers, radio, TV and videos, billboards, posters and variable message signs, mass mailings of brochures or newsletters, and distribution of flyers. Working with the media, an agency takes an active role in disseminating information. For example, the San Francisco area's annual "Beat the Backup" program during California Rideshare Week promotes ridesharing in partnership with a full range of the media.

Media strategies take a variety of forms. The simplest examples are flyers about projects within a corridor (a targeted market area) or variable message signs on highways that inform motorists (a targeted market) of delays ahead or of alternate routes. Promotional brochures can be used in a direct mail campaign or—as in Portland, Maine—through a full-size newspaper supplement explaining the regional transportation plan. Briefing reporters and editorial boards of both newspaper and broadcast media with in-depth background on a project or program prepares them to analyze the agency's approach and report on aspects of an issue in an even-handed way. In New Jersey, media executives were briefed on HOV lane proposals at the outset of planning for the project.

Why are they useful?

▶ **The agency can proactively frame the message,** rather than allowing the media to do it. Framing the message takes thought and attention about all aspects of a program or process. Media strategies should routinely be incorporated into any project that needs public focus, consensus, and understanding for it to move forward. In Idaho, the Department of Transportation uses video to introduce programs to the public and to provide news stories accompanying press releases for the media.

Effective media strategies deliver a uniform message to alleviate the spread of misinformation that often becomes a barrier to understanding or implementation. Strategies can be styled to meet varying levels of interest. For Seattle's regional transit plan, a detailed program of media coverage was integrated with other forms of community outreach.

How do they relate to ISTEA?

▶ **Better information enhances public understanding** of a project or program and is the basis of public involvement efforts. More people participate when they have access to substantial and accurate information. A well-informed public brings issues and concerns to the table that are thoughtful and analytical. This can lead not only to a better public participation process but also ultimately to a better planning process.

Do media strategies have special uses?

▶ **Media coverage helps generate interest** in a project or program. In any program, the critical first step is to develop a central message addressing such questions as: What is the plan or project? What does the public need to know in order to participate effectively? Who is the audience? When these questions have been addressed, the specific media to carry the message can be defined—specifically the kinds of media that will best serve the need of encouraging public participation.

The media provide a wide dissemination of information. This includes informing and educating the public via major articles and profiles on TV and in print as well as eye-catching ads to supplement the more formal required legal notices. Specific transit or highway projects typically reach out to citizens along the affected corridor, to interest groups, and to municipal officials. A media strategy for these kinds of projects could involve many activities. For example, in Washington, D.C., a media program to encourage ridesharing ranges from mall banners and decals for shop windows to an education program in elementary schools called "It's Cool to Pool."

Cable television is particularly useful as a tool for getting the word out. It is much cheaper than paid network advertising and has a more local flavor. Public access channels often videotape public meetings and other forums and play them repeatedly over a period of time. In addition, local cable channels have news programs, guest editorials, and interviews where project issues can be highlighted.

Who participates? and how?

▶ **Stakeholders and agencies can cooperate** in a media program on a project or program. Citizens' advisory committees or other community representatives can help identify the best way to get the word out. As individuals directly affected by a particular project or program, or through past experience, they may know the best way to reach the public. Agencies can use citizens as part of a speakers' program that sends representatives out to meetings of organizations such as Rotary or Lions' Clubs and chambers of commerce to promote the project.

How do agencies use the output?

▶ **An agency can monitor reactions** to the media plan. Random surveys can test market penetration and determine whether the message is meeting a targeted population.

A media plan can elicit community responses. Mass mailings can include simple questionnaires to be returned to the agency. A television presentation can suggest that reactions be mailed to the agency. On two-way talk shows, agency staff can interact with community callers to answer questions directly. As programs and projects evolve and progress, media activities can be adjusted to reflect their status and to introduce new information.

The key is to put together a plan that informs and educates the public by delivering the central message, no matter which type or types of media strategies are identified.

Who leads media strategies?

▶ **Media strategies are led by agency staff,** either the staff members most closely identified with the project or the public affairs officer. The involvement of citizens is particularly important to a successful media campaign. Citizen input and feedback help to "take the pulse" of a program to be sure the media chosen are appropriate and effective.

What do they cost?

▶ **Media strategies can be expensive** and must be used carefully and with considerable efficiency. A minimum strategy would include a central message, perhaps contained in a basic press kit with maps, fact sheets, and other background information, supplemented by a media tour of the project site. A more elaborate strategy is needed for more complex projects. For example, in New Jersey a strategic media plan was developed for outreach to print and electronic media to support the long-range transportation plan.

Time involved can be substantial over the life of a project or program. Some strategies are relatively low-cost. Briefings with editorial boards of both print and electronic media, as well as regular low-key contact with reporters and other media staff, are low-cost ways to deliver a message. A public service announcement can be a low-cost activity.

Costs rise with the kind of media used. A TV/radio or newspaper campaign can be costly, involving air time and production/printing costs. Costs vary by project and by how complex or long-term it is. There are low, moderate, and high levels of investment for utilizing the media. Depending on the needs of the project, a media strategy can range from relatively simple placards or videos to a high-profile media campaign involving radio and TV ads in prime time.

How are they organized?

▶ **Media strategies should be comprehensive.** Strategies should be evaluated as they are being assembled and after implementation. Questions to ask include

- breadth of techniques to use—How many techniques are appropriate?
- effectiveness—How many people were reached and how did they react to particular media?
- ease of implementation—How easy or difficult is it for the agency to implement the various elements? Is an outside consultant needed?
- cost—What are the cost-effective benefits in view of constrained resources?

How do they relate to other techniques?

▶ **Media strategies can be used in conjunction** with other techniques. For example, televising **citizens' advisory committee** meetings can enhance the participation process by giving it a wider audience. Results of **brainstorming, visioning, charrettes,** and **citizen surveys** can be reported in the media. News stories can promote a **telephone hot line** for answering questions. A **visioning** process in Atlanta included televised town hall meetings, newspaper editorials, and a six-newspaper survey of public opinion that produced 10,000 responses.

Are they flexible?

Media strategies can be extremely flexible. A wide range of techniques can be used, depending on the project, its budget, and the complexity of the message. In Los Angeles, a commuter newsletter bulletin was prepared for widespread distribution to inform commuters about ride options and programs.

Preparation and monitoring is crucial. Advance work is essential for staff to prepare the overall program and central message and to identify the targeted audience. In New York, for example, a range of media has been designed to promote the new HOV lane on the Long Island Expressway: a video on ridesharing for businesses to use at their companies; posters in the workplace on car pools and van pools; local cable channels for advertising spots; and variable message signs along the corridor. All these target a specific audience—either residents or employers in the corridor or daily expressway users.

What are their drawbacks?

▶ **Media outlets may outpace the agency** by looking for a scoop and framing the message without agency or citizen input. Public agencies have little control over stories before publication or airing. Agencies frequently spend valuable resources to explain a message or to try to reshape public opinion rather than framing the message in the first place.

Media strategies take a high level of commitment sustained over time to be successful. Strategic planning should start at the outset of a project with the development of a detailed central message.

When are they most effective?

▶ **Media strategies should be developed early** and sustained over time. In this way, the public is well-informed and aware from the beginning, thus enhancing the public participation process and creating greater opportunity for successful implementation of the project or program.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ▶

Regional Transit Authority, Seattle, Washington, (206) 684-1730
Idaho Department of Transportation, (208) 334-4444
New Jersey Department of Transportation, Communications, (609) 530-4280
Washington, D.C., Council of Governments Ride-finders Network, (202) 962-3327
Rides (Commuter Services), San Francisco, California, (415) 861-7665

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▶ FACILITATION

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

What's facilitation?

▶ **Facilitation is guidance of a group** in a problem-solving process. The group leader—a facilitator—is neutral in regard to the issues or topics under discussion. The facilitator works with the group as a whole and provides procedural help in moving toward a conclusion. For example, facilitation of community meetings on the proposed Monongahela Valley Expressway between Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Morgantown, West Virginia, led to an agreement by the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission to divide the project into separate, more manageable segments.

It is managed by the facilitator with the consent of the participants. The goal of both the facilitator and the group is to arrive at a collective decision through substantive discussions.

Facilitation leads toward empowerment and consensus. To the extent that the group is representative of stakeholders, the conclusion will be a position or a level of consensus that the group has jointly achieved.

Facilitation has these basic features:

- Group energies are focused on a task or a limited issue.
- Discussion is structured without controlling what is said.
- Discussion is kept to the topic, with new issues identified and reformulated as they arise.
- There is equalized participation in discussion.
- The facilitator probes for consensus or agreement on issues.

Why is it useful?

▶ **Facilitation brings out all points of view** represented in the group. In a small group, the facilitator can encourage discussion from all participants. Sharing viewpoints stimulates discussion. Given a lack of full expression of views, a facilitator can ask hypothetical questions to get discussion moving.

Time may be saved through facilitation. Ongoing differences of opinion or stalemate within a group challenge a neutral facilitator. The application of facilitation skills may be useful to break the stalemate and allow the group to move toward consensus. In Washington State, completion of I-90 depended on facilitation of agreement between the Department of Transportation and a neighborhood group looking for mitigation of nighttime construction.

A facilitator works for an open process. S/he ensures that the group is fully aware of the issues being presented prior to the discussion of steps to be taken. The facilitator assures that education on technical issues takes place as appropriate and seeks out the stances of participants on those issues. S/he ensures that points are clarified and elicits follow-up on questions. Opinions are respected by the facilitator, who assures that all members of the group are respectful of each other's views.

How does it relate to ISTEA?

▶ **Facilitation aids citizen input** in a variety of settings. As an integral part of the process, it includes consideration of conflicting goals, needs or interests—a democratic process of give-and-take. For example, the Maine Department of Transportation used professional facilitators in its partnering plan to develop highway projects.

Does facilitation have special uses?

▶ **Facilitation indicates a commitment to action.** A facilitated meeting takes on an importance that a regular meeting does not have. Its designation indicates a commitment by the sponsor to offer a way of overcoming a specific obstacle. Its existence demonstrates a commitment to involving citizens in the decision-making process. It demonstrates that the sponsor is open to taking public comment to heart.

Facilitation is flexible. It can be used at almost any time to assist a group in surmounting an obstacle to collaborative decision-making. It can be used to discuss either small or overarching issues. It can be used for comprehensive planning issues or for project-level decision-making. It can be used for policy review or detailed design.

Who participates? and how?

▶ **Representatives of citizens groups or stakeholders** are invited to participate in a facilitated group. A widespread diversity in viewpoints is expected to exist on issues. This diversity should be represented to ensure full discussion.

No special training of participants is required. Many individuals within the group may have a depth of interest in issues being discussed. This interest may range from a broad, long-term view of the issues within a geographic area to a specific and more short-term view of issues surrounding a project or program.

Citizens participate by examining and discussing issues with others in the group. Discussions are in as much depth as permitted by available time. The facilitator helps the group work within the time available to it. Typically, the major points of the discussion are recorded by an individual assigned the task. The facilitator may not be able to take minutes of the meeting; another individual should be assigned the task.

How do agencies use the output?

▶ **Facilitation is aimed toward a product.** The product may be reactions to agency policies or proposals or a consensus on an action to be taken. For example, meetings to develop a regional transit plan for Seattle were facilitated with professional assistance hired by an agency.

Group consensus may be used as input to an agency's work. The facilitator's goal is to bring the group together on an action or issue and find points of agreement. The facilitator may be able to craft a compromise position through give-and-take and over a relatively short period of time.

Who facilitates?

▶ **A neutral facilitator is selected by the sponsor** to lead the group. The facilitator must be accepted by the group as unbiased, constructive, and fair. This person should be an experienced professional familiar with assisting group discussions via group processes, communication, and conflict resolution skills. The facilitator should elicit both facts and opinions and help the group distinguish between them. It is helpful if the facilitator is also intimately familiar with the subject matter of the discussion.

The facilitator should not express a personal opinion in this role. Neutrality should be maintained at all times. If an opinion is requested, it can be given, but the facilitator should announce that s/he is stepping out of the neutral role prior to offering the opinion. At no time should the facilitator make a decision for the group. The "what I'm hearing" technique brings discussion back to the agenda and checks on whether people are in agreement.

A facilitator should be informal in leading the meeting. Humor is helpful in providing a relaxed atmosphere. A positive attitude is essential, as is uncritical recording of ideas from participants.

How is facilitation organized?

▶ **The sponsor determines the need for facilitation.** An issue that is divisive may call for facilitation. For example, the Virginia Department of Transportation used a facilitator to work on resolving potential conflicts with neighborhood organizations. The sponsor selects a neutral person for the role, sometimes from within the agency but more usually from an outside source.

The sponsor determines the agenda and schedule of the meeting. The agenda may cover one or more issues to be discussed by the group. The sponsor should meet with the facilitator to discuss the agenda and approach to be taken within the meeting. A site must be selected, typically in a space that participants perceive to be neutral.

The facilitator conducts the meeting. The sponsor should not attempt to control the direction of the meeting once it is underway. The facilitator conducts the meeting toward its stated goals. S/he may add questions to elicit responses from individuals. The facilitator should record participants' comments on a flip chart or butcher paper without editorializing.

What does facilitation cost?

▶ **Facilitation requires agency support staff.** Minutes of the meeting must be taken. A site for the meeting must be selected. Agency representatives typically attend to provide responses to participants' questions. In some instances, an agency needs to carefully explain its position or analysis, requiring staff to be available.

Material needs are minimal, but a quiet meeting room is mandatory. A flip chart is essential to write down participants' comments. Background information must be prepared as appropriate so that participants can quickly grasp the issues. Written materials dealing with contextual issues may be needed at hand to supplement information provided to the participants at the meeting.

How does it relate to other techniques?

▶ **Facilitation is a supplement to other techniques.** A facilitator can assist an established **citizens' advisory committee** to progress toward its goals. Facilitation is a requirement for a **charrette** or a **focus group** and can also be used in **brainstorming** or **visioning** sessions. It is typically used in a **collaborative task force.** Facilitation can be used in discussions associated with **transportation fairs. Video** can be used to record facilitated proceedings. In Idaho, facilitators helped with both focus groups and a citizens' advisory committee working on the initial efforts in a regional long-range plan.

What are the drawbacks?

▶ **Facilitation must be done by a neutral person.** A group may feel manipulated by an agency unless the facilitator is perceived to be impartial. In practice such a person may be difficult to find within an agency and may need to be sought from outside—which raises the expense of conducting a meeting. A respected community member may be an appropriate choice. The facilitator should record participants' comments on a flip chart or butcher paper without editorializing.

There is a limit on the number of interests that can be facilitated in a meeting. The sponsor of the process must recognize these limits in establishing the group.

Opponents may refuse to consider each other's ideas, despite the presence of an experienced facilitator. People who feel they are being controlled or patronized may withdraw from full participation. Agency staff who feel that the process is leading nowhere may not respond appropriately to questions from participants.

Time constraints work against facilitation. A short meeting may not provide enough time for a full discussion of the issue at hand. Participants may feel short-changed if insufficient time is allotted to discussion of a controversial issue.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ▶

Idaho Department of Transportation, (208) 334-4444
Maine Department of Transportation, (207) 287-3131
Regional Transit Authority, Seattle, (206) 684-1730
Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, (717) 939-9551
Virginia Department of Transportation, (804) 786-2935
Washington State Department of Transportation, (206) 440-4696

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▶ CITIZEN SURVEYS

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

What are citizen surveys?

▶ **Citizen surveys assess widespread public opinion.** A survey is administered to a sample group of citizens via a written questionnaire or through interviews in person, by phone, or by electronic media. The limited sample of citizens is considered representative of a larger group.

Survey results show public reactions to agency actions and gather information for use in the process. They can be formal (scientifically assembled and administered) or informal. For example, in a formal "trade-off" survey, citizens of Seattle were asked to say how they would vote for 18 different combinations of elements in a regional transit system. In an informal survey, the Ohio Department of Transportation attached a questionnaire to its draft statewide transportation plan, ACCESS OHIO, to solicit comments from reviewers of the document. During preparation of Oregon's transportation plan, citizen survey forms were made available in the draft of the Policy Element and at public meetings.

Scientific surveys give broadly applicable results. The Seattle formal "trade-off" survey, for example, was based on a random sample of the overall population carefully chosen to be statistically representative of the larger population and to explain what the general population prefers. Surveys that are informal tend to bring responses from a self-selected group of people—those who are more personally interested in specific transportation issues than the population at large. However, informal surveys can be designed to reach a broader group than those who attend public meetings.

Why are they useful?

▶ **Surveys portray citizen perceptions and preferences.** They can accurately report on what people know or want to know. They can test whether a plan or plan element is acceptable to the public as it is being developed. They can test the agency perception of what people are thinking and reinforce decisions that have been made through participatory programs. They can identify concerns before a public vote is scheduled, as was done in the Seattle area.

Surveys can test whether opinions are changing, if repeated after an interval of time. Results can be useful to the leaders of the process or to elected officials and community leaders. Results can be used to guide efforts to meet public concerns and develop effective messages for public information and for a media strategy. They can give meaningful clues as to the likely public acceptance of a plan, program, or process.

Better information enhances an agency's understanding of not only public concerns but also the process of public involvement. The agency can respond to survey results by providing missing or inadequate information that may not be getting through to the public or that may be misinterpreted. This can add to the substantive discussion of issues deemed important to respondents.

How do they relate to ISTEA?

▶ **Surveys do not replace other techniques** of public involvement. They provide a relatively accurate means of finding out what people think. They supplement other techniques of involvement by providing intelligence for the agency in preparing it to deal with issues that are of concern to a sector of the population.

Do they have special uses?

▶ **Surveys can focus citizen thoughts about a service** and provide a context for an opinion. A citizen survey in Chicago found that public attitudes about transit are not only a function of services received but are also strongly affected by people's feelings about crime, government in general, public civility, and the neighborhoods where the trip begins or ends. Citizen surveys were distributed at Delaware Department of Transportation's public "exhibits" of progress on a highway project to determine what attendees thought of ideas under discussion and to outline project issues to engage participants in thinking about them.

Surveys can determine preferences of segments of the population. In Utah the Wasatch Front Regional Council and the Utah Transit Authority conducted a survey of over 2,000 individuals to determine transportation preferences for disabled persons. Santa Barbara, California, used a citizen survey in conjunction with the update of its general plan to identify issues of particular concern to Hispanic and African-American business people and community leaders. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, used a visual preference survey to determine physical aspects and patterns that residents preferred and to show how those values could be reflected in an overall plan for the area.

Who participates? and how?

▶ **Surveys directly involve a relatively small population** of a state or region. In turn that population is involved only in a one-way participatory effort, without the opportunity for give-and-take with the sponsoring agency. For surveys with a randomized sample of the population, chosen in a statistically valid way, this sample can be stratified to include only people within a specific geographic area, income group, or other category of people from whom information is desired. Although it will never replicate the overall population precisely, it remains statistically valid.

Respondents provide a composite view of the larger population. In a scientific, statistically valid survey, these answers are expanded to reflect what the population as a whole might have answered if they had all been asked the survey questions. Informal surveys can never be viewed as the basis for such an expansion. However, large informal surveys can generally indicate the larger features of public opinion. In an informal survey in Atlanta, nearly 1,500,000 people were reached through an overall media strategy; over 10,000 people responded by filling out questionnaires on the regional visioning program.

Who leads a citizen survey?

▶ **Citizen surveys can be led by a trained agency staff.** In many cases it is appropriate to obtain outside help because of the complexity of the survey. Outside professional survey takers can also help the agency in moving expeditiously and in achieving the necessary levels of accuracy to assure the public that the results are valid and unbiased.

What do citizen surveys cost?

▶ **Informal citizen surveys are relatively inexpensive.** They can be prepared by agency staff and administered at meetings or as part of a document. But they can be useful. An informal survey was taken by the Albany, New York, metropolitan planning organization to solicit comments on the structure of the citizen participation program; the results showed that multiple techniques of public involvement in planning would be the most appropriate course of action.

Scientific surveys are expensive because of the complexity of drawing a sample population or structuring the questions asked. Time may also be a significant factor because of survey preparation and administration. Collecting, transcribing, and summarizing data becomes increasingly expensive as the number of questions or size of the sample increases. A carefully selected sample reflecting many types of interests within the larger population can take additional time and money. Also, a survey cannot stand alone; it must be accompanied by other public involvement techniques, each with its own cost.

How are citizen surveys organized?

▶ **The agency ascertains the need for information** and then determines the most appropriate means of getting it. The agency may need opinions about a planning effort or project that is getting underway. If so, the agency then needs to determine whether formal or informal comments are most appropriate. In part, this decision will turn on whether the agency wants opinions relatively quickly from known participants (an informal questionnaire), or whether there is a need for considered opinions from groups that are not ordinarily informed or involved in transportation processes (a more formal questionnaire and sample selection process).

The agency determines the types of questions to be asked. Opinions could be elicited from those surveyed about the process—its overall approach, its progress to date, the direction it seems to be taking, and potential next steps. Also, opinions could be directed toward considering aspects of a project—the corridor characteristics, alternatives under investigation, etc. Whether the questions are asked of known participants or citizens unknown to the agency, it is important to frame the questions in a clear, unambiguous manner. Sometimes questions may need to be in languages other than English or be accessible to persons with disabilities.

The agency establishes the survey questionnaire. Citizen surveys can be taken in a variety of ways. The simplest method may be the telephone interview. More elaborate methods, involving printed questionnaires, need extensive preparation and thought to avoid ambiguities or misunderstandings when received by a citizen respondent.

How do they relate to other techniques?

▶ **Citizen surveys can supplement other techniques.** For example, results of surveys can provide grist for discussion in **citizens' advisory committees, charrettes,** or a **brainstorming** session. Survey results can be a focus of a **video** production or a **facilitated meeting.** Surveys usually produce quantitative results that can be counterbalanced by the qualitative results obtainable from a **focus group.** Citizen surveys should be conducted so as to be accessible and understandable to Americans with disabilities.

What are the drawbacks?

▶ **Surveys are not interactive.** The information in a questionnaire should be neutral to allow respondents to make up their own minds about a question or concern. Surveys can spread misinformation if poorly or ambiguously drafted. Used in isolation, surveys produce data, not a dialogue between citizens and an agency or between groups of citizens.

A citizen survey may be difficult to undertake for some stakeholder groups for certain topics. Some people may prefer one-on-one discussions of issues that affect them, while others may prefer surveys because they do not have time to go to meetings.

When are they most effective?

▶ **Citizen surveys can be taken at almost any time** during a process. Used carefully and repeated over time, they can keep an agency well-informed of changes in public knowledge of a planning effort and its preferences within that knowledge. For example, the Seattle Regional Transit Project surveyed voters in two "waves" about 18 months apart to determine awareness of the project, overall support, and funding, phasing, and location preferences.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ▶

Albany, New York, Metropolitan Planning Organization, (518) 458-2161
Delaware Department of Transportation, (302) 739-4348
Ohio Department of Transportation, (614) 466-7170
Regional Transit Authority, Seattle, Washington, (206) 684-1730
Utah Department of Transportation, (801) 965-4359

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▶ TELEPHONE TECHNIQUES

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

What are telephone techniques?

▶ **The telephone offers a unique, two-way medium** for public involvement. It can be used to obtain information and to give opinions. Its use has entered a new era of potential applications to community participation, going beyond question-and-answer techniques toward the evolving new multi-media connections with television and computers.

Telephones have long been used for community involvement. However, innovations are available to expanding telephone use in citizen participation. For example, Iowa City, Iowa, offers telephone contact to an information TV channel, which includes bus routes and transit information, a routefinder to specific streets and points of interest, transportation for the elderly and the disability community, police radar locations, and a "towlist" of all license plate numbers that have more than $15 in accumulated parking fees.

Potential telephone techniques for public involvement include

- auto attendant—a series of tiered recordings leading an inquirer to a recorded answer or the appropriate staff person;
- information bureau—a staff person responds orally to a broad variety of standard queries, such as bus schedules or meeting dates;
- E-mail—a staff person responds to computer queries;
- hotline or voice bulletin boards—a staff person or recording answers questions about a specific project or program;
- FAX-on-demand—a recorded message provides a menu of documents available by FAX and how to obtain them;
- telethon—a telephone call-in for comments during a TV program;
- electronic town meeting—a telephone call-in combined with a scheduled TV program, which shows results of public calls;
- interactive voice response system—information retrieval from a main computer using telephones or terminals; and
- interactive cable TV information—a series of information boards or videos that can be called up by phone to a TV screen.

Why are they useful?

▶ **Telephone techniques are basically interactive.** The telephone is used to initiate a conversation or a query, and a response of some kind is made to advance the action. The responses can vary from prerecorded messages to staff responses on specific topics. For example, a toll-free hotline number was provided for public information during the Washington, D.C., Bypass Study, which covered an area of 6,600 square miles in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

Telephone techniques reach out to a broad variety of people who might not otherwise participate in transportation processes, including people with disabilities. They are used in community surveys to reach a statistically viable sample of the general population. When combined with television, telephone techniques potentially open a new audience for public involvement. For example, in Savannah–Chatham County, Georgia, a local TV station presented a VISION 2020 program, process, and critical issues, followed by an invitation to give opinions by telephone; results were tabulated and shown later on the same station like election night returns.

How do they relate to ISTEA?

▶ **Telephone techniques could be a part** of nearly any program, especially if used as input to early planning stages. They can be a basic means of involving citizens, particularly if planned comprehensively in conjunction with other techniques.

Do telephone techniques have special uses?

▶ **Agency use of telephones can cover many topics.** An audiotext service can be programmed to give answers to many pieces of information, including times and dates of community meetings. For example, in Virginia Beach, Virginia, a municipal telephone service is capable of answering 700 commonly asked questions; after receiving information, citizens can leave messages and respond to survey questions.

Agency use of telephones can cover a large geographic area and show a desire to communicate with the general public. Telephones can be available around the clock for messages. They can be programmed to respond in more than one language. They can be used to poll citizen opinions.

Telephone techniques are easily understood. Special training for participants to get involved or express ideas is not required. For example, to introduce new users to its municipal service telephone information system, Colleyville, Texas, provides refrigerator magnets as a telephone directory to three-digit subcategories for guidance when calling about specific topics, including transportation.

Telephone techniques can combine several applications. For example, in Diamond Bar, California, an aggressive telecommunications project is being used to enhance public communications and to reduce vehicle trips through combining an electronic bulletin board, optical imaging technology, geographic information systems, electronic and voice mail, and FAX systems.

A FAX-on-demand system can deliver documents in response to queries. These documents can be works-in-progress or final results of a process. They can cover costs through the use of a 900 number or a credit card billing. For example, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the State House of Representatives is exploring a FAX-on-demand system to deliver copies of draft and final legislation in response to inquiries and is already using a FAX-modem system to provide documents to its members.

Who participates? and how?

▶ **Any citizen can participate** in most telephone techniques—the exception being the structured telephone survey, which requires specific individuals as part of statistical sampling techniques. In using the telephone, it is important for an agency to provide background information to participants to bolster the ability to understand the subject matter and this method of participation. Agencies should make special efforts to accommodate people who do not speak English.

Citizens participate by phoning their queries or ideas to an agency. The agency is responsible for noting and recording ideas presented in this way and should inform inquirers of how their comments are being recorded and considered. Participation is further encouraged if results of telephone interactions can be displayed and distributed to the participants.

How do agencies use the output?

▶ **Telephone survey results are especially useful** in sampling public opinion. They can demonstrate the degree of public support for an agency's proposals and thus shape the results. They can show potential political difficulties, becoming useful in developing policy.

Hotlines help the public to reach the right staff person to give out information about a program. They help the agency receive and disseminate accurate information. For example, Fort Collins, Colorado, offers a pothole hotline in its City Line telephone service for citizens to report pothole locations. Fort Collins also offers information on right-of-way permits, highway access, excavations and construction activities, signal problems, bike lanes, and buses and carpools as well as city council and neighborhood meeting dates and subjects.

How are they organized?

▶ **Highly technical telephone techniques** require outside assistance from specialized agencies or firms. The evolving relationships with cable TV are likely to require expertise and specific programs or equipment.

Telephone techniques need a lead person within an agency—a person who is vitally interested in trying new techniques for reaching people. The Loveland, Colorado, interactive telephone/cable TV service was initiated by the City Manager.

How do they relate to other techniques?

▶ **Telephone techniques can be part of a media strategy.** They can provide information about meetings or ongoing planning processes. For example, nine cities in the Dayton, Ohio, area provide a community calendar of upcoming events, accessible by phoning a local cable TV station.

Citizen surveys can be made by phone. Telephone surveys or opinion polls are frequently used to obtain information that is not otherwise available to an agency. They are also used during a process when a specific piece of information is required.

Results of telephone polls can be used in many other situations. They can be part of a **focus group**—as an element for discussion; they can be part of a **charrette**—to establish the points of view of the community at large; they can be used in **citizens' advisory committees**—to deal with community feedback on a program or project.

Special efforts should be made to accommodate hearing disabilities. Text telephones such as TDD (Telephone Devices for the Deaf) phones are available with small screens and keyboards to aid people who have hearing disabilities.

Telephone techniques should not be used in isolation from other techniques such as **public meetings or hearings.** They can be especially useful in obtaining citizen reactions after programs or proposals have been adequately explained. They cannot replace face-to-face encounters with other participants and agency staff.

What do telephone techniques cost?

▶ **Costs of using telephone techniques vary,** depending on the extent of a program. Simple answering devices are inexpensive, but not interactive. Staff assignments may be necessary in nearly all other techniques.

Telephone surveys can be inexpensive but in all cases involve a sampling technique that should be statistically valid for subsequent use and for credibility.

Basic interactive machines for cable TV use are becoming less expensive, and some channels donate air time as a public service. Producing a telethon or cable TV program may be expensive, depending on the extent of information to be presented. Live action and animation are the most expensive portions of a presentation.

What are the drawbacks?

▶ **In recorded messages, participation is strictly limited** unless a means of contacting staff or obtaining additional information is offered to the general public. Information is frequently disseminated without a means for people to offer opinions or to reach appropriate staff people for further queries.

Telephone techniques may not be democractic, if a large part of the population has no phone. This would reduce the possibility of all participants having an equal status and an equal opportunity to participate.

Telephones do not always allow people to hear other opinions. A hotline provides agency information only. In telephone surveys, the participants must wait until the results are posted for them to read. However, in electronic town meetings the results are posted shortly after polling is completed.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ▶

Colleyville, Texas, (817) 281-4044
Diamond Bar, California, (909) 396-5689
Fort Collins, Colorado, (303) 221-6522
Miami Valley Cable Council, Dayton, Ohio, (513) 438-8887
Pennsylvania House of Representatives, (717) 783-6430
Virginia Beach, Virginia, City-Line, (804) 427-4068
Washington Bypass Study, Virginia Department of Transportation, (807) 786-2935

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▶ VIDEO TECHNIQUES

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

What are video techniques?

▶ Video techniques use recorded visual and oral messages to present information to the public, primarily via videotapes or laser disks. Although video is a method of providing useful information in a medium that many people now prefer, public agencies are just starting to tap its potential use. In a recent example, videotapes were used by New Jersey Department of Transportation as an introduction to each of the regional forums held in preparation of its statewide transportation plan.

Why are they useful?

▶ A video may be worth a thousand words. An easily understood video can be more useful to some people than reading or hearing about transportation. With the nearly universal availability of TV and the emphasis on visuals in today's society, videos have a role in transportation that has not yet been fully explored.

Videotapes provide an additional medium for reaching citizens. Although videotapes are widely used in this country for entertainment, they can also be used for education and the dissemination of information about transportation. They can be geared to a group or an individual, depending on an agency's purposes. They can stimulate by taking a dull subject and making it lively. They can describe the steps in a process. For example, videotapes were prepared by the Connecticut Department of Transportation to enhance public understanding of incident management on an interstate highway. Videos can be made available in local TV stations, at public libraries, and at video stores or distributed door-to-door for special issues, as has been done in recent political campaigns.

Videos can introduce citizens to meetings and hearings. Set to replay endlessly, they present messages the same way each time without variation. Because these repeated messages are "canned," they must be presented in an informative, lively, and friendly manner. This may be extremely important when used with, say, a formal public hearing. For example, videotapes were used to introduce and describe an open house public hearing process by Virginia Department of Transportation.

Videos can document a planning process. They can document the proceedings of a meeting or hearing or other events in the public participation process. They can expose people, including agency staff or managers, to a wide range of participants, thus helping viewers understand others' concerns. Videos are frequently used to record focus group proceedings for later replay and analysis of specific remarks and reactions to comments.

Videos can illustrate different planning scenarios. They can help people visualize a situation before, during, and after construction. They can be used to simulate a trip on a transportation facility before it is built. For example, a videotape was prepared by the New York State Department of Transportation to illustrate the impacts of HOV lanes and was shown to elected officials, the business community, and the general public. A separate video was prepared to simulate the experience of being in a car driving on both ten- and twelve-foot-wide HOV lanes.

How do agencies use the output?

► **Videotapes reach a broad audience for participation.** People who cannot be reached in any other way may react to a videotape. Videotapes are being used to provide viewers with information that can be called into home TV sets. Currently, this technique tends to use static displays, but in the near future TV presentations will include live action as well as static and animated material on videotapes.

Videotapes can be used for dry runs of presentations. Presenters can act out a presentation and review it on tape. Critiques can then be made of the presentation in terms of voice modulation, posture, body language, jargon, use of visual materials, etc.

Agencies can distribute videotapes over a large geographic area. Videos can be recorded in more than one language. They can frequently clarify a complex process to supplement an oral presentation. For example, in Boston's Central Artery/Tunnel project, videos have been used to simulate driving through a tunnel and along a surface street during the stages of phasing of the project. They have also been used to update the community on construction staging plans and mitigative proposals.

What do video techniques cost?

► **Costs of producing videotapes vary.** Simple videos made in-house are inexpensive but may not be successful in reaching the audience with the right message. The danger is that an amateur production will turn people away from the agency's approach or goals simply because of the appearance of the video. A more professional production may be expensive initially, but reproduction of the tapes will be relatively cheap.

Length can vary in accordance with the message to be delivered: videotapes can be prepared with a brief message or with more substantive content. For example, in Missoula, Montana, a four-minute videotape was used to introduce people to the principal issue of a meeting—the improvement of a single, complicated intersection.

A high level of staff expertise is needed to produce a video. Even with donated video equipment, producing a video by an agency staff may remain difficult. Outside assistance is probably required to produce a videotape. Staff may be available to use videotapes to record highway or transit rights-of-way, but the skills are not generally transferable into a video that will be credible and able to inform the public on more complex issues.

Who develops these techniques?

► **Video usage requires a lead person** within an agency—a person interested in trying new techniques for involving the public in transportation. This individual is frequently an existing staff person or a staffer hired for the purpose. Using video techniques frequently requires outside assistance from specialized agencies or firms. Although personal recorders are widely used, videotapes to portray public activities should be professionally and competently produced using professional-quality equipment.

▶ **Video techniques can be a part of almost any project** or program as a method of providing information. They can be used as input to early planning stages. They can be a basic means of providing information to citizens, especially if planned in conjunction with other techniques.

How do they relate to ISTEA?

▶ **Video techniques can be part of a media strategy.** A video can be released for use in television as camera-ready copy. An agency can thus provide the news media with an accurate portrayal of a process or project to be shown as part of regular programming. Videos are a good means of providing information about meetings or ongoing planning processes. For example, Seattle's Regional Transit Project used videotapes to present 302 thirty-second advertising spots on five local TV stations.

How do they relate to other techniques?

Videos might be able to reach people who would not otherwise participate in transportation processes, including **people with disabilities.** Special efforts should be made to accommodate hearing disabilities. TDD (Telephone Devices for the Deaf) phones are available with small screens and keyboards to aid people who are deaf or have hearing disabilities.

A video is always part of a larger process and can be closely related to other techniques. Because a videotape is a one-way device, suitable for disseminating information, it has many potential applications. It can be an element for discussion in a **focus group** or **charrette.** It can record the points of view expressed at **public meetings and hearings.** It can document positions established at **citizens' advisory committees.** It can report on agency progress at a **transportation fair.** A video should not be used in isolation from other techniques. It cannot replace face-to-face encounters with other participants and agency staff. In all video techniques it is important that participants be fully informed that they are being recorded.

Videotapes can substitute for field trips. A video can illustrate the characteristics of a region or a corridor, alternative modes of transportation, alignments and adjacent neighborhoods, potential impacts, mitigating measures, and methods of participation in a process.

▶ **Videotapes can be produced in different ways,** using materials such as live action, computer images, graphics, maps, and charts. They can be produced incrementally. Slide shows can be augmented with scripts. Scripts can be recorded and slides shown at pre-determined intervals. Finally, a finished script and storyboard (picture sequence) can be developed and turned into a video. Special equipment and processes are required to transfer computer information onto tapes, and the level of quality can vary.

How are they produced?

Who participates? and how?

► **Any citizen can participate in using videotapes.** The only requirements are a TV set and a playback machine. Simply watching the videotape is all that is required. However, for improved participation, it is important for an agency to provide background information to participants to bolster the ability of understand the subject matter and this method of participation. It is also important to provide telephone contacts to permit access to agency personnel for further information.

What are the drawbacks?

► **Videotapes are not two-way.** Unless special provision is made for a citizen to respond, the viewer watches a message without being able to give feedback. Watching a videotape, a citizen hears no opposing views. Thus, a means of contacting staff or obtaining additional information should be included in the videotape. Some cable TV stations use interactive techniques including playing of a video and allowing a response from viewers by telephone.

Video viewers are basically self-selected. Access is limited to viewers with a playback machine. Special attention to the needs of people with disabilities is needed. Interpreters may be needed to make the information available to individuals with hearing disabilities. Text must be sufficiently large so that people with sight disabilities will be able to read it. For the blind, narration should be sufficient to explain the material even though it cannot be seen.

Video techniques are rapidly changing. They are currently used principally for home rentals or for information in scheduled programs at TV stations. In some localities, it is already feasible for viewers to call in to view non-scheduled material to be seen immediately or at a viewer-chosen hour on a specific channel. Increasingly interactive techniques are being developed in the media. For example, in a few years, it will be possible for agencies to compose videotapes with information about specific processes to be broadcast on TV, with citizens able to register opinions in a poll immediately following the presentation of the video.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ►

New Jersey Department of Transportation Long-Range Plan, (609) 530-2866
New York Department of Transportation Region 10, (518) 360-6006
Central Artery/Tunnel Project, Boston, Massachusetts, (617) 951-6448
Regional Transit Authority, Seattle, Washington, (206) 684-1730
Missoula, Montana, Department of Transportation, (406) 549-6491

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▶ PUBLIC MEETINGS/HEARINGS

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

How do meetings and hearings differ?

▶ **Public meetings present information** to the public and obtain informal input from citizens. Held throughout the planning process, they can be tailored to specific issues or citizen groups and can be informal or formal. Public meetings have been used for many years to disseminate information, provide a setting for public discussion, and get feedback from the community. Over 100 public meetings were used to develop a subway extension in Boston. While the technique itself is not innovative, some creative applications are being made. For example, Delaware used a public "exhibits" in an informal open house format with one-on-one discussions as a focal point of each phase of a highway planning effort.

A public hearing is a more formal event than a public meeting. Held prior to a decision point, a public hearing gathers citizen comments and positions from all interested parties for public record and input into decisions. Public hearings are Federally required for many highway projects and may be held in transportation planning at the discretion of the sponsoring organization. Public notices in a general circulation newspaper cite the time, date, and place of a hearing. The period between notice and hearing dates provides time for preparing comments for submission to the agency. During this period, the agency may accept questions and provide clarification. The Georgia Department of Transportation increases the period of questions and answers by an open house held in conjunction with a public hearing.

Meetings and hearings have these basic features:

- Anyone may attend, whether as an individual or as a representative of specific interests.
- Meetings may be held at appropriate intervals; hearings are held near the end of a process or sub-process before a decision.
- Hearings require an official hearing officer; meetings do not.
- Citizen comments are recorded in written form as input to an agency.

Why are they useful?

▶ **Meetings and hearings are forums** for receiving citizen comments. Both are widely used to achieve a basic level of citizen input to transportation planning and project development and to exchange information with a wide representation of citizens.

Public meetings are optional events and thus are tailored to agency and community needs or expectations. Public hearings, by contrast, are frequently used to fulfill regulatory requirements. Meetings and hearings can, however, be linked. For example, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in both Atlanta, Georgia, and Bridgeport, Connecticut, held multiple meetings on a transportation improvement program (TIP) at local public review meetings, followed by a public hearing at the MPO level.

Public meetings are flexible and can be held as necessary. They can be a part of MPO or Statewide planning or part of a single project. There can be multiple sessions on a single topic: the Kentucky Department of Transportation held community meetings on the State TIP over a 3-month period. Meetings can be held in multiple locations, as can hearings.

How do they relate to ISTEA?

▶ **Public meetings provide for early, timely citizen input** on each occasion they are held. They can be scheduled at specific milestones or phases within a participatory process. They bring a good opportunity to meet ISTEA goals by affording citizens time to speak and to bring ideas into the process. The give-and-take of citizen and agency questions and responses, along with interaction among citizens and with staff, is part of the democratic process and is a desirable attribute from a citizen viewpoint.

A public hearing is a single opportunity for citizens to be heard. Held at the end of a process without other opportunities for involvement, it does not provide opportunity for early and continuing involvement as described in the Metropolitan and Statewide Planning Regulations. More frequent citizen input during the process is desirable, preferable, and more satisfying to citizens as a means of meeting participation requirements. For example, in Seattle, 700 community meetings and a series of forums, open houses, and hearings were held to provide information and receive formal testimony on the draft Regional Transit Plan.

Do they have special uses?

▶ **Each meeting or hearing facilitates participation.** Scheduling these opportunities demonstrates progress toward involving citizens in projects and programs. They provide a place to identify positions and report a consensus or divergence of opinion to the agency. In Brisbane, California, a "Have Your Say Day" was held to obtain citizens' ideas for the city's planning efforts.

Who participates? and how?

▶ **All citizens can participate in meetings or hearings.** In some instances, participation may be structured, either within larger meetings or for geographic areas. Both the Baltimore and Washington, D.C., MPOs provide time for formal public comment periods (15–20 minutes) at each of their meetings. In Portland, Maine, the MPO received input from recognized neighborhood associations. Special efforts were made to reach out to businesses by the New Orleans MPO, by sponsoring two major conferences dealing with transportation issues of interest to businesses. The Mobile, Alabama, MPO brought in Chamber of Commerce representatives to review TIP projects and worked with business and other representatives to forge a consensus.

How do agencies use the output?

▶ **Meetings and hearings help to monitor citizen reactions** to agency policy, proposals, and progress. By observing reactions at periodic meetings or at a hearing, agencies and citizens are made aware of opinions and stances. If public meetings are held early in the process, these opinions may be analyzed and responded to before they become solidified or difficult to modify. Public hearings provide formal input to decisions.

Meetings can become a driving force for technical work. The MPO of Dane County (Madison), Wisconsin, is devoting 1 year of a 3-year process of developing alternative long-range plans to responding to citizen input and comments brought up at a series of meetings scheduled throughout the period.

▶ Meetings may be led by an agency staffer or by a citizen. In some instances, it may be appropriate to hire a professional facilitator to lead a meeting, especially if the issue to be discussed is highly divisive or controversial. A "discussion document" helps prepare citizens for participation if distributed prior to public meetings, as is done in Los Angeles.

Who leads a public meeting or public hearing?

By contrast, hearings are led by a public hearing officer, who is an agency representative. Agency staff help with information dissemination, particularly when a public hearing is combined with an open house. The Virginia Department of Transportation publishes a step-by-step printed guide for the open house public hearing, emphasizing that attendees can attend at a time of their own choosing and can present comments either formally or informally, as desired. Georgia Department of Transportation reports that proportionally more citizens make comments at open forum public hearings.

▶ Resource and staff needs can be substantial, depending on the type of meeting. Delaware's exhibit meetings were heavily staffed—16 to 18 professionals were stationed throughout the room to answer questions and to determine the concerns of the 300–500 people who attended each event. In a meeting or hearing preceded by an open house, displays of major elements of a plan or process are required for full explanations to citizens. Sketch overlays, notepads, or comment sheets are needed to record public comments at the meeting.

What do they cost?

▶ An agency organizes a public meeting or hearing and prepares pre-meeting materials, including meeting announcements and agendas, displays, audio-visual materials, and any mailings or publicity that may be necessary. The public should be made aware of the free access to these materials. In San Diego, the MPO publishes an agenda and monthly digest of its meetings for public distribution. Agencies should consider the needs of people with disabilities and transit access in selecting a convenient place and time.

How are they organized?

The agency or citizens may want to set up ground rules for meetings. These could include

- recognizing the legitimacy of concerns of others;
- accepting responsibility to come to a meeting prepared for discussion;
- listening carefully and sharing discussion time with others;
- encouraging everyone to participate;
- discussing with intent to identify areas of agreement, to clarify differences, and to search for common understanding; and
- establishing a speaker's time limit.

For a public meeting, the agency provides meeting summaries in written form, describing areas of agreement and disagreement. All points of view must be clearly and fairly stated. A hearing report is formally prepared, in many cases based on a stenographic record. At Seattle meetings, an abbreviated summary is read and agreed upon by members at the close of each meeting of the Sounding Board for the Regional Transit Authority; longer, more detailed summaries are sent after the meeting.

How do they relate to other techniques?

▶ **A media strategy is always necessary** for either a public meeting or a public hearing to attract the widest possible audience. For example, adequate advertising for public events should always include more than a single newspaper advertisement. During a public meeting, a **brainstorming, visioning,** or **charrette** technique may be used. A **facilitator** may be appropriate. Special provisions need to be made to comply with the needs of **disabled people** for access to the meeting. **Video or audio tapes** of proceedings may be important for analytic or other purposes.

An open house format is similar to a transportation fair, for either a public meeting or a public hearing. Presentations, slide shows, and one-on-one discussions continue throughout the event. Exhibits are laid out as a series of stations: a reception area; a presentation area for slide shows or short talks; areas for one-on-one discussions between citizens and agency staff members, and displays of background information, activities to date, work flow, anticipated next steps, and an array of primary subject panels.

What are the drawbacks?

▶ **A public hearing is an insufficient level** of public involvement when held at the end of a process and not accompanied by any other opportunities to participate. Citizens may feel that their concerns cannot be addressed because they are heard too late and have no chance of being integrated into the final decision. At open house public hearings, although citizens may present views publicly, they are heard primarily by the agency and not by other participants. Such hearings in Delaware include time for speakers to talk in front of others who may have conflicting viewpoints.

Public meetings do not always allay citizen doubts about agency credibility. Although they improve the possibility of adequate citizen participation, meetings must be frequent enough to demonstrate agency concern about public involvement. Public meetings must be held early in the process and reasonably frequently thereafter to dispel citizen fears that they are perfunctory or that the agency is not listening to their concerns. Large meetings or formal hearings may intimidate citizens and restrain commenting.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ▶

Atlanta Regional Commission, (404) 364-2500
Dane County, (Madison), Wisconsin, (608) 266-4137
Delaware Department of Transportation, (302) 739-4348
Georgia Department of Transportation, (404) 986-1360
New Orleans Metropolitan Planning Organization, (504) 568-6611
Regional Transit Authority, Seattle, Washington, (206) 684-6776

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▶ AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

▶ The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) stipulates involving the community, particularly those with disabilities, in the development and improvement of services. For example, in rail transit planning, participation by the disability community is essential for the key station plan. In highway planning, it is essential in the development of access at sidewalks and ramps, street crossings, and in parking or transit access facilities. Also, sites of public involvement activities as well as the information presented must be accessible to persons with disabilities.

What does this mean?

ADA requires specific participation activities—particularly for paratransit plans. These include:

- outreach (developing contacts, mailing lists, and other means of notification to participate);
- consultation with individuals with disabilities;
- opportunity for public comment;
- accessible formats;
- public hearing;
- summary of significant issues raised during public comment period;
- ongoing efforts to involve the disability community in planning.

▶ The disability community comprises many people. As much as 14% of the population has hearing, vision, or mobility limitations. In addition, many other Americans are temporarily disabled during part of their lives—whether aged, infirm, or recuperating. In identifying and consulting with the disability community, agencies find a wide range of strikingly different needs. Ideas and input from people with disabilities is insightful as to their needs in using the programs or facilities that are being developed. Additionally, people with disabilities participate as interested citizens.

Why is it useful?

▶ All events held for programs or projects with Federal aid and open to the general public must be made accessible to everyone, including the disability community. Special efforts must be made to comply with both ISTEA and ADA in meeting the statutory requirements.

How does it relate to ISTEA?

▶ People have disabilities in sight, hearing, or mobility. People with sight impairments include those with visual impairment or total blindness. People with hearing impairments include those with partial hearing impairment or total hearing loss. People with mobility and self-care impairments include those in wheelchairs or on crutches, some elderly, people with children, and the temporarily disabled such as pregnant women or those recuperating from injuries. The Spokane, Washington, Transit Authority solicited disability community involvement through a "Rider Alert" program. Orange County, California, Transportation Authority scheduled one-on-one meetings with representatives of individual groups to obtain input to its planning effort. In Juneau, Alaska, public workshops were held to discuss compliance with ADA's transportation requirements.

Who participates? and how?

Does it have special requirements?

▶ **Sign language interpreters may be required.** They must be hired early, since they are in scarce supply. Two interpreters are necessary for meetings longer than 1 hour, to provide a break for each other. Public information for the meeting should include a notice that sign language interpreters will be made available upon request, as was done by the Sacramento and San Mateo County, California, Regional Transit Districts and in the Johnson City, Tennessee, Transit System. An individual who is both blind and deaf can be accommodated by a deaf/blind interpreter, who will use sign language in direct contact with that person's hands.

Listening assistance may be required, depending on the meeting place. For example, small machines are available to amplify speakers' voices via an FM transmitter and receiver system heard only by those with hearing disabilities. It may be possible to rent or borrow them from a State commission for the deaf. In Massachusetts, they are borrowed from the Guild for the Hard of Hearing. Meeting rooms in newer buildings may have an FM loop embedded in the floor to be used for transmission. A State commission for the deaf may have Computer-Aided Real Time (CART) reporting in which the reporter transcribes proceedings onto a screen during the meeting. Cable television stations at meetings may bring interpreters for deaf persons or may provide interpretation or captioning in rebroadcasting.

A telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) is essential for communicating with people who are deaf or have communications impairment over the telephone. Under ADA, all public agencies should have this inexpensive, modem-like device connected with a telephone into which messages are typed rather than spoken. A small LED screen on each machine shows the message. In some machines the message may also be recorded on paper tape.

Sight-impaired people may require materials in accessible format. Prior to meetings, the Williamsport, Pennsylvania, Bureau of Transportation advertises the availability of its plan in large print, tape, Braille, and computer diskette. The Delaware Administration for Specialized Transportation certifies that plans are available in accessible formats, either in large print or on cassette tape. For people with sight impairments, documents are prepared with large print (22 point) in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Meeting announcements are prepared in large print in Wheeling, West Virginia. The Regional Public Transportation Authority in Phoenix, Arizona, used large, bold sans serif typeface in its questionnaire on a plan update. Whichever formats are chosen, they must be usable by the person making the request.

How do agencies use the output?

▶ **Agencies' efforts are not fully inclusive** of everyone's ideas until they include people with disabilities. This requires an expansive approach to accommodate the population that is disabled, and that would not otherwise be accommodated in transportation plans or processes.

Who leads the process?

▶ **Every State and MPO should make events accessible** to people with disabilities. Information on accessibility needs may be found from State commissions dealing with disabilities, deafness, rehabilitation, or blindness, as well as from local agencies or advocacy groups. Many of these groups assist in doing outreach for transportation processes.

Each State has been asked to help people with disabilities through formation of an Assistive Technology Partnership, which is federally funded to provide information, research, and training on ways to assist such people. In some cases, State agencies are a central focus for assistance to individuals with disabilities. In Massachusetts, for example, telephone tapes are provided to sight impaired people by the Commission on the Blind, the Association on the Blind, and the Vision Foundation. These three services receive information about dates or events and transfer that information to an audio tape.

What does it cost?

▶ **Assistance need not be expensive,** but it requires special care and attention. Staff need education to be mindful of the special needs that must be met in setting up public meetings and hearings. In some cases, it may be appropriate to hire a staff person trained in dealing with these special needs. In other instances, it may be possible to use existing State or local agency services.

How is it organized?

▶ **An accessibility checklist for meetings and hearings:**

1. Accessible meeting or hearing site:
   - Has the site been visited and viewed with disabilities in mind?
   - Are primary entrances accessible (doorway widths, steps)?
   - Is there circulation space for wheelchairs throughout and at front of meeting or hearing room?
   - Are microphones, if used, at wheelchair height?
   - Is there an amplification system to aid hearing?
   - Are drinking fountains, rest rooms, and public telephones at wheelchair height?
   - Is the meeting site accessible by public transit/paratransit?
   - Is there parking for persons with disabilities?
   - Is there signing for accessible route to meeting room?
2. Meeting materials and services:
   - Are meeting notices in alternative formats for deaf, hard of hearing, blind, and visually impaired people?
   - Are published meeting materials available prior to meeting in alternative media: large print, computer disk, taped, or Braille?
   - Are sign language interpreters available if requested?

How does it relate to other techniques?

▶ **All meetings or hearings must be accessible** to comply with ADA, if they are to be open to the general public. This includes most **public meetings or hearings,** as well as **charrettes, brainstorming** sessions, and **visioning** meetings. **Citizens' advisory committees** can serve the interests of persons with disabilities with appropriate representation of them. Many committees and focus groups where participation is by agency selection of representatives may not need to be fully accessible, but special arrangements need to be made for the disability community or its representatives.

What are the drawbacks?

▶ **There are no drawbacks to involving** the disabled community. The process is not fully inclusive of all community interests until they are represented. Efforts that relate only to people with disabilities isolate them from other parties. The goal of public involvement measures is to include everyone in the process. This can be done by making community participation accessible and by promoting integration of people with disabilities with many other citizens who want to have a voice in transportation.

When is it most effective?

▶ **All events may attract people with disabilities.** Special efforts and events are useful to attract people with disabilities and to encourage their participation in the process. When the expertise of the disability community is used to make the event accessible, it is likely to be more effective.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ▶

Project ACTION, *ADA Public Participation Handbook,* (202) 347-3066, (800) 659-NIAT (Voice/TTY)

RESNA Technical Assistance Project, *Technical Assistance Personnel Directory,* (202) 857-1140

American Association for Advancement of Science, *Barrier Free in Brief,* Voice/TDD, (202) 326-6630

Massachusetts Assistive Technology Partnership Center, Voice (617) 735-7820, TDD (617) 735-7301

Capitol Transit, Juneau, Alaska, (907) 789-6901

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